

HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY AND CREATIVE ALCHEMY

THE EMERALD TABLET,
THE CORPUS HERMETICUM,
and the
JOURNEY THROUGH THE
SEVEN SPHERES

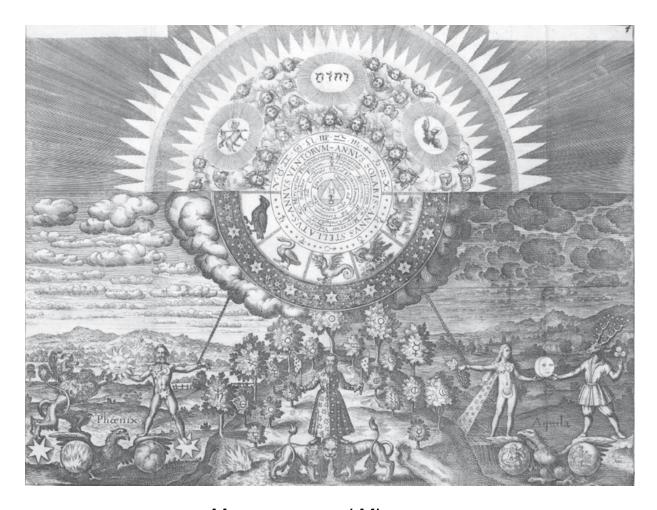
MARLENE SEVEN BREMNER



Inner Traditions Rochester, Vermont



To Hermes



Macrocosm and Microcosm from Johann Daniel Mylius's *Opus Medico-Chymicum*, 1618

HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY AND CREATIVE ALCHEMY

"Hermetic Philosophy and Creative Alchemy is an important and necessary work, especially for anyone involved in art and art making who wishes to use their making as a spiritual practice. Alchemy is an art; in fact, it has been called 'the Art' of arts in that all creation, according to alchemical theory, flows from the same principles. Implied in this is that any art practice may be used in the alchemical work of making change. In *Hermetic* Philosophy and Creative Alchemy, firmly grounded in primary texts and enriched through her own practice, Bremner provides a remarkably varied and thorough foundation in Hermetic philosophy, cosmology, and practice with leads for deeper study. With this foundation established, Bremner then sets before us another rich feast in her word-portraits of each of the planetary spheres—each portrait an incredible array of myth, poetry, science, philosophy, and magic. Understanding these spheres is critical, as they are the stages of 'the old, old path' of the soul's journey to the One. Hermetic Philosophy and Creative Alchemy provides the maps and tools for this journey. It is all here. The only thing missing is you."

BRIAN COTNOIR, ALCHEMIST, ARTIST, AWARD-WINNING FILMMAKER, AND AUTHOR OF ALCHEMY: THE POETRY OF MATTER AND PRACTICAL ALCHEMY: A GUIDE TO THE GREAT WORK

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List of Abbreviations

- **Asc.** The Asclepius (or the Perfect Sermon). Sources: Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:307–90; Copenhaver, Hermetica, 67–92; Scott, Hermetica, 286–377.
- CH The Corpus Hermeticum. Sources: Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:3–303; Copenhaver, Hermetica, 1–66; Salaman et al., The Way of Hermes, 17–78; Scott, Hermetica, 114–285.
- **DH** The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius. Source: Salaman et al., The Way of Hermes, 101–22.
- NHC The Nag Hammadi Codex. Source: Meyer, The Nag Hammadi Scriptures.
- **PGM** The Greek Magical Papyri. Source: Betz, The Greek Magical Papyri.
- **Stob.** Excerpts by Stobæus. Source: Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, 3:3–134.

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INTRODUCTION

The Hermetic Path of Self-Initiation



And let no one wonder at the school of our learning. Though it be contrary to the courses and methods of the ancients, still it is firmly based on experience, which is mistress of all things, and by which all arts should be proved.

—Paracelsus, from a. E. Waite, *Writings*OF Paracelsus

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS, THE "THRICE-GREAT," is at once a man and a myth, a god and priest, a messenger and psychopomp. He is the immortal and eternally ancient one to whom this work is most indebted, for Hermes is the heart and tongue of Hermeticism. From the dawn of Egyptian civilization and into the modern era, this beneficent and wise sage has been regarded as an incorporeal, divine entity bestowing the secrets of the stars, the Sun, and the Moon: a mediator between the gods and humanity. Yet many who hear the name Hermes Trismegistus have only a vague notion of who this being is. Likewise, Hermetism, the philosophical, religious, and mystical tradition attributed to him, is not included in the major religions of the world, seemingly lost somewhere between the lines of Christianity, Gnosticism, and paganism. The name Hermes does not have the same renown as Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Allah, Yahweh, or Shiva. For many, Hermes is simply the Greek trickster, the inventor of the lyre, and the messenger of Mount Olympus, also known as Mercury to the Romans. Yet

this god of thieves and shepherds is only a partial aspect of the immense and numinous qualities personified by the greater Hermes, that is, Hermes Trismegistus, whom the Egyptian priest Manetho (ca. early third century BCE) called the "second Hermes." Manetho, whose name means "truth of Thoth," attributed the "first Hermes" to the Egyptian deity Thoth, credited with inventing speech, writing, mathematics, medicine, engineering, astronomy, astrology, magic, and alchemy. Thoth was responsible for inscribing on stelae the sacred teachings in hieroglyphics, and it was the second Hermes—Hermes Trismegistus—who copied the sacred inscriptions into books after the flood, which were later translated from Egyptian to Greek. 3

The Thrice-Great version of Hermes formed when the Greek Hermes and the Egyptian deity Thoth merged during the Hellenistic era (323–31 BCE). This composite god, certainly much more vast than the sum of his parts, is revered today in occult circles and by solitary hermetic mystics, alchemists, philosophers, magicians, pagans, and witches. As we will see in exploring some of the history of Hermeticism, this tradition has gone through various seasons of efflorescence and growth to phases of relative enigma and dormancy, and in the early modern period, Hermetic texts were essentially discredited as mere plagiarism. However, the cult of Hermes lives on in today's underground and emergent currents of esoteric thought, where his name again resounds with meaning.

In the present time of upheaval, uncertainty, overpopulation, scarcity, global conflict, environmental degradation, and severe social injustice, the occult arts and sciences of astrology, alchemy, and magic are rising to the surface of awareness, becoming more and more accepted in mainstream culture. Could we be on the leading edge of a Hermetic revival to equal the flowering of Hermeticism in the Renaissance? Will the name Hermes Trismegistus take on the same potency as Buddha or Jesus? In what ways does the Hermetic tradition serve to help humanity—collectively and individually?

Hermes Trismegistus is equated with the *Logos*, the Divine Mind, through which all intelligible forms and ideas find their realization in the sensible world. The sacred arts of alchemy, astrology, and theurgy, conveyed to humanity through the Divine Mind, teach us about the relationship between the immortal Soul and the material body, or

consciousness and matter; between fate and the will; and between an idea and its realization. As human beings, we are endowed with the same creative capacity that exists in the Divine Mind, and through the creative process we are part of the creation of the ceaselessly changing, eternal universe. The cosmos is birthed through the Mind in its multiplicity of forms, all emanating from the unlimited potential of the One. Understanding the creative process goes hand in hand with humanity's stories about the creation of the cosmos and of humanity itself; it is the essential knowledge that we need for the creation of a future that is not only sustainable, but also flourishing and prosperous for all of life.

When the heart yearns to know from whence it came and whither it may go, Hermes is there at the crossroads to guide the way. At the deepest, most profound, and fundamental level, the question echoes in eternity: "Why am I here?" and extends to all levels of religious, philosophical, mystical, scientific, and metaphysical inquiries and explanations. Yet this question may rest somewhere in the back of our minds while a more pressing question remains at the forefront. For the ancients and for the modern human, the question remains the same: "How may one be happy?" In today's world, many of us are surely asking, "How may one be happy in a world filled with so much injustice and suffering?"

For the Greeks, true happiness was encapsulated by the Greek word eudaimonia (also eudaemonia and eudemonia), which extended beyond simple pleasure or contentment to mean "human flourishing," "prosperity," or "blessedness." Consisting of the words eu ("good" or "well") and daimon ("spirit," "divinity," or "guardian"), eudaimonia refers to the fulfillment of one's divine potential and coming to know their daimon, their true nature that partakes of the gods. For Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, eudaimonia was the highest attainable good of the human being. Partaking of the nature of the gods is at the core of the Hermetic and alchemical philosophy, and it is through the creative process in all aspects of life that we commune with the immortal realms.

Who are these gods of which we speak? In the Hermetic tradition, there are seven archetypal energies, personified as gods and each having a male and female aspect, with which the human mind is patterned. These seven energies, described as spheres, encompass the seven wandering stars (planets), by which is meant the five traditional planets (Saturn, Jupiter,

Mars, Venus, Mercury) and the two luminaries (the Sun and Moon). These spheres have attendant daimons, their spiritual or divine powers. Throughout our lives we encounter these energies in a multiplicity of forms, internally and externally. They are our teachers and guides both into and out of suffering. By immersing ourselves in their stories and learning of the ways in which they manifest in reality, we come to realize our own godlike natures and abilities.

How do we live joyfully, with ease and understanding, and how do we open up the vast store of potential that lies latent within every human being? How do we unleash our godlike creative capacities and transcend the limits of these material bodies? How do we live among humanity in a material world and yet maintain our contact with the Divine? The answer proposed by many of the ancient philosophers was that happiness (eudaimonia) is attained through virtue (*arete*), a state of moral excellence. For Aristotle, in keeping with Socrates and Plato, virtue is central to the living of a good life. Yet in his view, virtue lies in finding the proper equilibrium, or "golden mean," between extreme vices of excess or deficiency, not necessarily aligning to the exact middle point between them, but sometimes closer to one or the other depending on the individual's circumstances.

For the present work we are concerned with the Hermetic concept of virtue, or "the seeds of God," meaning virtue, self-control, and devotion (defined as "God-gnosis"), and the opposing daimonal vices as explicated in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (9.4). Knowledge of God is to be born in God, to recognize the immortal self while one remains embodied in mortal flesh. The process involves de-energizing the passions of the body that lead to ignorance: "And the soul's vice is ignorance. For that the soul who hath no knowledge of the things that are, or knowledge of their nature, or of Good, is blinded by the body's passions and tossed about" (*CH* 10.8). In turn one replaces the vices of the soul with divine, *Æonic* consciousness, aligning with the One and the Good, as it is said that "on the other hand the virtue of the soul is Gnosis. For he who knows, he good and pious is, and still while on the earth divine" (*CH* 10.9).

Though we all drink from the River of Lethe (forgetfulness) upon our descent into the body, succumbing to vice, the path of virtue leads us to the grail, overflowing with the Nectar of Truth and Immortality. However, let

us not pretend that it is as simple and straightforward as a mere casting off of vice and aligning with the Good. As it is said in the Hermetic treatise called "The Cup or Monad," "Tis very hard, to leave the things we have grown used to, which meet our gaze on every side, and turn ourselves back to the Old Old [Path]" (*CH* 4.9). In life, it is often the case that the lines are blurred, and there are times when vice is a powerful and necessary ally on the path to wholeness.

We all hold the key to our own liberation, known in Hermetic alchemy as the philosopher's stone; however, not everyone will find this key, nor will but few set out to look, thinking it a myth or a task too daunting to be approached. It may be a long and arduous path that deters many who set out with the best intentions. This sentiment is echoed throughout hermetic and alchemical writings across the ages. In the words of the fifteenth-century alchemist Basil Valentine, "although many are engaged in the search after this Stone, it is nevertheless found but by very few. For God never intended that it should become generally known. It is rather to be regarded as a gift which He reserves for those favoured few, who love the truth, and hate falsehood, who study our Art earnestly by day and by night, and whose hearts are set upon God with an unfeigned affection."

As a brief but necessary aside, let us not be distracted or put off by the word god in approaching this matter; for the theist, it becomes a search for God, but for the atheist or agnostic, it is simply a search for that indestructible kernel of truth that lies within the mystery of matter. The inimical relationship between religion and science has itself been the cause of much unnecessary suffering. As irreconcilable as they have seemed to be when approaching the issue from one side or the other, they are not mutually exclusive and can coexist as two valid lenses with which to view the cosmos and our place in it. The reconciliation of opposites, or the acceptance of paradox, plays an important part in spiritual awakening and in the opus alchymicum, for "Our Stone . . . is derived from two things, and one thing, in which is concealed a third thing." We must be able to place ourselves at both ends of the pole, so to speak, in order to conceptualize the whole. Further, we must be wide enough, and wise enough, to meditate upon various religious and mystical concepts without attachment or prejudice. This spiritual empathy and open-mindedness is aptly described in the words of G. R. S. Mead, who says that "until we can put ourselves understandingly in the place of others, we can never see more than one side of the Infinite Life of God." 10

Like rivers finding their way to the sea, the multiplicity of religious, spiritual, mystical, metaphysical, philosophical, and scientific traditions are drawn from the same source and flow to the same end, though in our ignorance the waters of the spirit have been polluted, dammed, diverted, and misappropriated, so that those who would wish to drink directly from the source are instead led to drink from the hands of the ordained and the initiated. For some, it is enough to be given the rules of spiritual or moral conduct by those orthodox authorities, to do one's best to live by them, and to trust that one's efforts will be rewarded in a more pleasant afterlife or subsequent incarnation. For others, there is a more pressing desire to dissolve the veil between the world of sense perceptions and the world of unseen causes, to undergo an initiatory process that awakens the Mind, Body, and Soul to the infinite "I Am" and unlock the mysteries of matter. Such a desire may lead the seeker down a self-initiated path of philosophical and metaphysical inquiry into nature and the cosmos, perhaps attaining divine revelation, and the development of a direct relationship to God.

What separates the self-initiated path from a strictly religious approach is the emphasis on the direct experience of the Divine, attained through personal practice of virtue, and through devotion, study, and contemplation. Self-initiation provides no titles or grades, no honors or badges or tokens of spiritual achievement. The reward for one's diligent and earnest endeavors in this regard is gnosis, which cannot be granted by another, but only experienced for oneself. For those that desire the acknowledgment and training that organized initiation can offer, there are orders such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.), the Rosicrucian Order AMORC (Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis), Masonic lodges, and many others, and certainly the initiations that they offer may be of great value for many individuals. It may be one's nature to try one and stick with it, or to move from one to another and to retain the essence of each, or to seek gnosis outside of established circles. For those who want to trust in their own soul to guide them to gnosis, without an intermediary, there is a different path.

Where does one turn, then, for guidance and support, when setting out on the path of self-initiation and gnosis? There exists a plenitude of books upon the matter, and one can easily begin anywhere one feels intuitively inclined to begin, as the intuition is the higher faculty directing our senses in the direction of truth, like plants that sprout in darkness and grow toward the light. One should follow this impulse of intuition, and perhaps that is how you find yourself reading this book. However, the fact remains that no book will ever serve to provide you with that which you seek.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The aim of this present work is to illuminate in a small way the origins, development, and general philosophy, theology, and mysticism of Hermeticism and the art of alchemy, in order that a solid foundation may be laid. Special attention is given to alchemy as a psycho-spiritual art of engagement with life, involving the Soul, Mind, and Body, or in other words, Consciousness, Thought, and Matter. Emphasis is placed on the value of self-initiation and the cultivation of a direct relationship with the Divine, and full immersion into the Hermetic mysteries. Where I may lack in scholarly and technical training, I make up for in personal experience of Hermetic truths through creative discipline, devotion, personal revelation, and over twenty years of intensive study, practice, and experimentation in the occult. In addition to this, my own experience of uniting art and alchemy has greatly informed my views in this work. It is my conviction that this union empowers the initiate to trust their own intuition and creative capabilities for personal and global transformation.

It is not the intention of this book to be a comprehensive and solitary source for Hermetic philosophy, nor do I proclaim to be anything more than a seeker who has been inspired (called by Spirit) to put my experience and understanding into written form, in the hopes that others may thereby benefit in their own quest. The aim of this book is to introduce the reader to the Hermetic teachings and associated subjects of alchemy, astrology, philosophy, and magic that have served as a means for self-initiation from the most ancient times to the present day, and to set these forth as meditative discourses that penetrate beyond the rational mind to the intuitive soul. As a means to help the reader integrate and conceptualize what has been historically called the perennial philosophy (*philosophia*

perennis), comparative analysis is offered between various cultures and their mythologies, mystic and religious traditions, and sacred texts to reveal the common threads that link them through time and space. However, the primary focus of this work remains Hermetic and seeks to present the core of Hermetic teachings as they've developed through the ages in a way that is both scholarly and initiatory.

By following the teachings of Hermes, the initiate may open the mind and attune to its inherent divinity, partaking of its immortal essence and coming to know "God," or that ultimate and eternal presence within. This is not so much a discovery of something new, but rather more like uncovering what has been there all along, spoken of as an awakening from a drunken sleep or stupor, as in the "Pæmandres" (*CH* 1.27): "O ye people, earthborn folk, ye who have given yourselves to drunkenness, and sleep, and ignorance, be sober now, cease from your surfeit, cease to be glamoured by irrational sleep!" The numinous quality of such an experience can verge on surreality and awaken a mystical, vibrant participation with life.

In alchemy, this awakening process is called "the Great Work" (magnum opus), and it certainly is no small endeavor. Between the personal and collective traumas that we carry and the deep conditioning that we undergo by our families and cultures, we may be deeply enmeshed in a materialist and alienated conception of the world that resists fundamentally the notion that communion with the infinite mind of God is even possible. Yet just as the earth forms a rough stone, that the river may later smooth it into a peaceful and harmonious shape, experiencing the trauma of life softens and shapes the soul. In this way we are prepared through the ordeals of life to approach the ineffable truth of who and what we are, and what our purpose is. By reconciling the opposing principles within us, facing our own inner dragons, and purifying our consciousness, we awaken to a much greater Self, in tune with our individual passion and purpose, and empowered to create a life that is beneficial to others and ourselves. Underlying the cosmogonies, theologies, philosophies, and theurgical practices of Hermeticism is the fundamental truth that we are creating the world through our imagination and thoughts each and every day.

DEFINITIONS: HERMETIC, HERMETISM, AND HERMETICISM

Before we can properly describe the origins of the Hermetic tradition, let us first clarify the terms to be used throughout this work. In surveying works pertaining to the Hermetic tradition, one encounters the words *Hermetism* and *Hermeticism*, which may seem interchangeable; however they bear differing and specific meanings. According to Antoine Faivre in his essay "Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism," the difference can be attributed to the god Hermes himself, from whose name both Hermetism and Hermeticism derive. 12

Hermetism, as Faivre explains, relates to the ancient Greco-Egyptian god Hermes Trismegistus, an extension of the even more ancient Egyptian god Thoth. It encompasses the body of theological and philosophical writings and teachings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, specifically a body of work cumulatively referred to as the *Hermetica*. Hermeticism, on the other hand, relates to the Greek Hermes, also known as Mercurius, the psychopomp and messenger between humans and the gods that facilitates the transmutations of alchemy. Thus the terms Hermetic science and sometimes refer specifically to alchemy; Hermeticism Hermeticism has also come to encompass Hermetism, astrology, Qabalah, Christian Theosophy, occultism, and magic. $\frac{13}{13}$ This book is primarily written from within the multifaceted gem that is called Hermeticism, with frequent references to its origins in the tradition of Hermetism.

There are some who would do away with the popular term *Hermeticism* altogether. Wouter J. Hanegraaff asserts that Hermeticism derives from faulty conclusions drawn by Frances A. Yates in the 1960s about the Hermetic writings and the so-named Hermetic tradition that developed in the late Middle Ages. He is in agreement on using *Hermetism* to describe the religio-philosophical writings of the *Hermetica*. However, according to Hanegraaff, despite there being some important works of occult science—the astrological, theurgical, and alchemical writings—attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, many were not, and hence it isn't appropriate to label them Hermeticism. ¹⁴ For simplicity, however, we will use the term *Hermeticism* to refer to the broad scope of Hermetic occultism, and *Hermetism* when referring specifically to the theological works of the *Hermetica*.

The word *Hermetic* is used in a number of ways, all of which say something about the nature of Hermes himself. *Hermetic* is used to describe subjects of an abstruse, occult, esoteric, or mysterious nature, and also applies specifically to the teachings of Hermes. A Hermetic seal is used when something needs to be airtight and protected from external influence, an important aspect of operative laboratory alchemy, and a powerful metaphor for internal alchemy. A person living a Hermetic life is someone that is adapted to reclusiveness and solitude, study and contemplation. All of these meanings are important within the context of Hermetic and alchemical studies, for the mysteries transmitted through Hermes and the path to gnosis, the knowledge of the Soul, are best approached in a Hermetic way, with devotion, study, contemplation, sufficient solitude, and in a way that protects the process from external influence that might corrupt it.

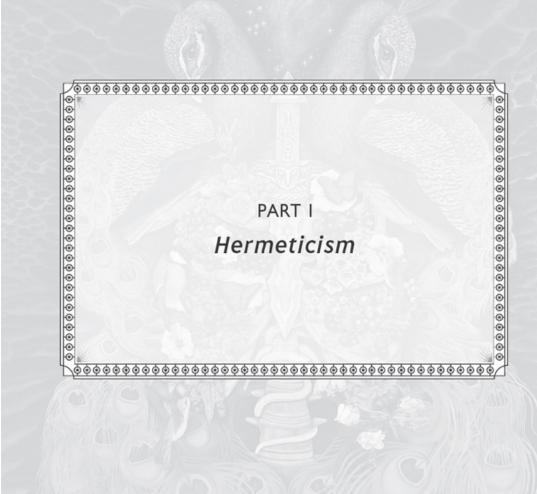
THE PATH AHEAD

This book is arranged into three parts, each one building on the last. In part I we will answer the question of what exactly Hermeticism is and why it matters to us today, particularly if we are in any way involved in the occult arts, and even more so for those of us who want to live spiritually oriented and creative lives, in tune with the cosmos and awakened to our innermost potential. To begin with, a brief overview is given of the various ancient texts that make up the *Hermetica*, including the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Emerald Tablet*, which are fundamental to an understanding of the tradition. Throughout the book, passages from these profound teachings of Hermes will be drawn upon to show the ways in which they initiate us into gnosis and liberate the imagination. Then we will follow the arc of Hermeticism's development, from its distant past up to the current day, finishing up with a look at the three branches of Hermeticism: astrology, theurgy, and alchemy.

Part II provides a look at the Hermetic story of creation and ordering of the cosmos, and how this relates to alchemical philosophy. This is a system for understanding the relationship between consciousness and matter, between the individual soul and the cosmos, and between the Creator and the created. Alchemical theory is fundamental to any true understanding of alchemy, whether one is practicing in a laboratory, or as a spiritual and creative process.

Finally, in part III, we will take a journey with the wandering stars, those seven inner planets of the solar system whose archetypes are alive within each and every one of us. The purpose of this voyage is to saturate the mind with planetary myths and correspondence that will speak to the unconscious and catalyze inner transformation. Each of the seven planets has its own set of indispensable lessons to impart to those of us on the path of self-initiation, and they are the key to unlocking the seven chakras for the liberation of creative potential. As these pages are written in an initiatory manner, the reader will interpret them based on their own personal level of initiation, and any ideas that spark the inspiration and ignite that inner alchemical fire should be investigated further, with intuition as your guide. These chapters should be digested slowly, with plenty of space taken for personal reflection and integration in Body, Mind, and Soul.

May these teachings be an inspiration and a light to you on your path, as they continue to be on mine, stoking the flames of transformation; liberating your imagination to create a mystical and expansive life; and instilling in you a deep appreciation for the teachings of Hermes and all that they have to offer humanity at this crucial time in our evolution. In the words of Virgil, *sic itur ad astra*, "thus one goes to the stars."



Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon.

—HERMES

1

Hermetic Texts



The student of Comparative Religions will be able to perceive the influence of the Hermetic Teachings in every religion worthy of the name, now known to man, whether it be a dead religion or one in full vigor in our own times. There is always a certain correspondence in spite of the contradictory features, and the Hermetic Teachings act as the Great Reconciler.

—THE THREE INITIATES, THE KYBALION

HERMES-THOTH WAS CREDITED with writing many of the foundational texts of Hermetic philosophy. According to Iamblichus, Hermes authored more than 20,000 works. As previously mentioned, Manetho differentiated between the first Hermes, by which he meant Thoth, and the second Hermes, who was the teacher Hermes Trismegistus. The living Thoth was said to have predated Moses by about 400 years and lived in the time before the pharaohs, whereas many of these texts are of a more recent origin and were written in Greek, Latin, and Coptic. To confuse the matter further, the Siena Cathedral bears an image of Hermes that reads, "Hermes Trismegistus, contemporary of Moses," and some have even wondered whether or not Hermes and Moses were the same person. So it was from this ancient being known as Thoth that the Hermetic teachings are said to have come to us, yet we do not know if Thoth ever existed as a living man or a myth, or simply as a personification of the Mind. Florian Ebeling, in his book *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus*, states

assertively that "the eponymous patron of Hermeticism never existed: Hermes Trismegistus was a fiction, a fruitful fiction with lasting effects." This assertion is made based on the fact that Hermes Trismegistus is in fact a syncretized deity deriving from Thoth and Hermes.

Whether Thoth or Hermes ever walked the earth in human form—and when—we cannot say with certainty. However without a doubt, as man or myth, prophet, god, or sage, Hermes Trismegistus has exerted an unequivocal influence upon the hearts and minds of humanity from early antiquity. One finds vestiges of his teachings scattered throughout the world's wisdom traditions, having influenced the Sabeans, a sect of unorthodox Muslims who proclaimed themselves to be pagans, and the Sufi mystics who identified Hermes with their prophet Idris, also identified with the Jewish prophet Enoch. Hermetic writings were held in high esteem by the early fathers of the Christian Church, St. Augustine, Lactantius, Cyril, and others, who saw in them the Christian mysteries and firmly believed in their authorship by Hermes Trismegistus. Of the Greek philosophers we know that Pythagoras, Thales, Democritus, and Plato all made sojourns to the land of Egypt. One sees the evidence of Hermetic influence in the works of Renaissance artists Michelangelo, Botticelli, and Raphael, as well as in Symbolist and Surrealist art. Hermes is much more than an ancient sage; as the messenger of the One Mind, he is present at all times in all places.

Hermes Trismegistus is an eternal and incorporeal source of initiation into the mysteries, the pure illumination of thought that has and always will be accessible to those who seek it. Thus many of the texts attributed to Hermes were pseudepigraphical and written by initiates who perceived themselves to be writing from a place of communion with this most numinous inner voice. Despite the ambiguity as to the true authorship, we can define the works deemed Hermetic as those that specifically refer to the authority of Thoth-Hermes and are instilled with both theological and philosophical themes, and extending to works on alchemy, astrology, and theurgy.

The writings collectively called the *Hermetica* date back to late antiquity but were the result of a much longer process of development that began in ancient Egypt. Yet the Hermetic writings were not simply direct translations from the Egyptian, but were modified and adapted by the philosophical views of the translators, as Iamblichus states in *On the*

Mysteries: "For the books which are circulated under the name of Hermes contain Hermaic opinions, though they frequently employ the language of the philosophers: for they were translated from the Egyptian tongue by men who were not unskilled in philosophy." In the syncretistic spirit of the Hellenistic period, the Hermetic teachings of Egypt took on elements of not only classical Greek philosophies, including Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, and Stoicism, but also Iranian and Jewish influences.

The *Hermetica*, composed in the first few centuries CE, are a collection of philosophical and theological writings including the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*; the collected excerpts of Stobæus including "The Virgin of the World"; and the Hermetic texts discovered in the twentieth century at Nag Hammadi. These writings are unified by their reverence for Thoth or Hermes, the Divine Mind and initiator of souls. Often presented as discourses between divine entities or teachers addressing their disciples, such as Hermes to Asclepius or Tat, or Nous to Hermes, these revelatory texts serve an initiatory function into the Hermetic mysteries. Their purpose is to awaken and initiate the soul into gnosis, or direct knowledge of God, facilitating spiritual transmutation and rebirth. The beautifully written texts of the *Hermetica* relay the Hermetic version of Genesis; descriptions of the celestial hierarchies and astrological wisdom; knowledge of the soul as it descends (or falls) into the body and how it may ascend through the seven spheres into the heavens; and what it means to live a pious and virtuous life.

The work of rising through the spheres may be approached through philosophical piety and devotional study of these sacred Hermetic texts. These initiatory writings range from full discourses, like the "Pæmandres" in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, to the short aphorisms of the *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius*, and include hymns of praise and prayers to the One. While the bulk of the *Hermetica* are of a philosophical and theological orientation, the work of Walter Scott and André-Jean Festugière in the early study of Hermeticism led to the practice of referring to certain Hermetic texts from the same time period as the "popular" or "technical" *Hermetica*, to include works of a theurgical, astrological, alchemical, and otherwise occult nature. Scott's assessment rings with an obvious distaste for these texts, calling them "pseudoscience" and "rubbish." This harsh judgment aside, we can at least agree that the distinction is justified on the

basis that the philosophic doctrines are less directly focused on technical Hermetic material. There are, however, descriptions of Hermetic astrology throughout the *Hermetica*, as well as some theurgical elements, which we will explore below, showing that such a distinction between philosophical and technical *Hermetica* is best not taken as absolute, but rather as a general statement as to the overall quality and focus of these varying Hermetic sources.

Each of these Hermetic arts—astrology, magic, and alchemy—may be applied to the creative process, awakening the Divine Creator within. At the core of the Hermetic teachings is the message that the individual soul is not separate from the One; therefore the creative process that brought the cosmos into being is the same process through which a thoughtform or idea is made manifest. The contemplation of Hermetic philosophy and practice of Hermetic art, integrated with a creative discipline, allows for deep levels of healing both personal and ancestral trauma, while awakening initiates to their true creative power. In ascending through the spheres and reuniting with the Source, we bring this divine gnosis back into the body, grounded on the Earth, to begin creating a new world infused with eternal truth. Understanding our power as individual creators united with the One creative Source is the key to creating and sustaining a more harmonious world.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL HERMETICA

Body's sleep became the soul's awakening, and closing of the eyes true vision, pregnant with Good my silence, and the utterance of my word (logos) begetting of good things.

—CORPUS HERMETICUM (1.30)

Tabula Smaragdina

Perhaps the most legendary, and certainly one of the most essential of the Hermetic texts from an alchemical perspective, is the *Emerald Tablet*, or

Tabula Smaragdina, a short series of Hermetic precepts that describe the creation of the world, elemental relationships, the correspondence of the above and the below, and the miracles of the One Thing. It is also the secret to the transmutation of the alchemical *prima materia* (primeval matter), and as Brian Cotnoir writes, it presents the "cyclic flow of creation—all creation, regardless of the scale or time of the composition. It attests to the truth of unity and the act of creation." 10

There are varying stories as to how the tablet was originally said to have been found. Dennis William Hauck, in his book *The Emerald Tablet*, has given an excellent account of the legendary history of the tablet, said to be originally discovered in the tomb of Hermes by Alexander the Great, ca. 331 BCE. Alexander felt divinely empowered to promulgate the teachings of Hermes after visiting the Oracle at Siwa, ¹¹ also known as the Oracle of Zeus-Ammon, where he was pronounced the "son of Ammon," or "son of Zeus." The tablet, said to be made of a green, glass-like material, was inscribed with ancient Phoenician script in bas-relief. Alexander assembled a team of priests and scholars to translate the tablet into Greek, purportedly to include the Egyptian priest Manetho.

The tablet was placed on public display in Heliopolis. It is unknown what became of it at this point, but Hauck speculates that Alexander hid the tablet with other sacred items in an underground cavern in Cappadocia (modern-day Turkey), in the area that would become a town named Tyana, never to return for it. Centuries later it was rediscovered by Balinas (born 16 CE), known as Apollonius of Tyana, who brought it to Alexandria, where it was kept in the Great Library after his death in 98 CE. According to Hauck, the tablet remained with the library until around 400 CE, when it was removed and hidden on the Giza plateau to protect it from invading Christians. Translated copies of the *Emerald Tablet* made their way to the Arabians, who created their own versions.

The earliest known version of the *Tabula Smaragdina* (*Emerald Tablet*) is found within an eighth-century text attributed to the Muslim alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan (ca. 721–815), called *Kitab Sirr al-Khalīqa wa Ṣan'at al-Ṭabī'a* ("Book of the Secret of Creation and the Art of Nature," also called "Mystery of Creation"), who in turn attributed it to Apollonius of Tyana. 14 The *Tabula Smaragdina* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century, and many translations have followed, including those by M. Georgio Beato,

Isaac Newton, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and Fulcanelli. The following is an English translation of the version of Jabir ibn Hayyan, who was later known as Geber:



Fig. 1.1. An artist's depiction of the *Emerald Tablet*. From Heinrich Khunrath, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae*, solius verae, Hannover, 1609.

- 0) Balinas mentions the engraving on the table in the hand of Hermes, which says:
- 1) Truth! Certainty! That in which there is no doubt!
- 2) That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of

one.

- 3) As all things were from one.
- 4) Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon.
- 5) The Earth carried it in her belly, and the Wind nourished it in her belly, as Earth which shall become Fire.
- 6) Feed the Earth from that which is subtle, with the greatest power.
- 7) It ascends from the earth to the heaven and becomes ruler over that which is above and that which is below.
- 8) And I have already explained the meaning of the whole of this in two of these books of mine. 15

The *Emerald Tablet* is the source of the familiar axiom "As Above, So Below," the basis of the doctrine of correspondence so prevalent throughout Hermetic philosophy, which tells us how things that we observe on a microcosmic level (the realm of humanity and our subjective experiences) relate to and reflect circumstances that we can observe on the macrocosmic level (the heavens and spheres of celestial influence, and the greater cycles of nature), and vice versa. By studying these correspondences we come to know the truth of the One Thing by which all miracles are accomplished, and thus we understand the mechanism that underlies the creative process itself.

The Corpus Hermeticum

The bulk of the writings that make up the *Hermetica* are contained within the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of ancient Greek-Egyptian texts written in the first three centuries CE. These writings were lost for centuries but were preserved in a single manuscript found in the eleventh century. It was missing entire sections and much of the writing had deteriorated to illegibility. The damaged manuscript came to Michael Psellus, a Platonic reviver in Byzantium, who put the writings in circulation again. It was again rediscovered in Macedonia (Bulgaria) in 1460 by a monk named Leonardo of Pistoia, who was sent by the Italian Renaissance court of Cosimo de' Medici, philanthropist, scholar, and ruler of Florence, to search the monasteries of Europe for its forgotten writings.

Medici had been greatly influenced by the introduction of Neoplatonism in Italy, which was brought by Georgius Gemistus Pletho from Byzantium in the late fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth century, and had collected manuscripts of both Plato and Plotinus, giving them over to the humanist philosopher Marsilio Ficino to be translated. However when Cosimo obtained a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* manuscript around 1460, he gave it to Ficino for immediate translation. These writings, believed to be ancient revelations of the living Hermes Trismegistus who predated Plato, were of such importance that Cosimo asked Ficino to put aside the untranslated *Dialogues* of Plato and translate the *Corpus* first. He completed it in 1463, just a year before Cosimo's death. 19

Ficino's translation from the Greek into Latin, published in 1471 and entitled *Mercurii Trismegisti Liber de Potestaie et Sapientia Dei*, or "The Book of Mercury Trismegist concerning the Power and Wisdom of God," was exceedingly popular, being printed in twenty-two editions. Over the following several centuries numerous translations were made, the breadth of which G. R. S. Mead has written of in his *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, published in 1906, with their various faults accounted for.

The *Corpus Hermeticum*, as it has come down to us, is a compilation of seventeen treatises, fourteen of which were included in Ficino's Greek translation, about the nature of consciousness, humanity's relationship to God, and the Hermetic mysteries of the cosmos. As was the custom of the time, they are written as theological-philosophical dialogues and sermons between a small group of figures, namely Hermes, Nous, Asclepius, Tat, Ammon, and Agathodaimon.

Foremost of these figures is *Nous*, a Greek word that is usually translated as "Mind," though its real meaning is evasive. In Hermetic theology, Nous, God, the One, Source, or Mind is omnipresent in the universe, the invisible and immutable good that is yet visible in the sensible world. In the first tractate of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Nous calls himself Pæmandres (Poimandres), or "Man-Shepherd," describing himself as the "mind of sovereignty," according to Brian P. Copenhaver's translation; the "*Nous* of the Supreme," according to Clement Salaman et al.; or "Mind of all masterhood," as G. R. S. Mead translates it. Pæmandres only shows up two other times in the entire *Corpus*, in tract 13. Hermes Trismegistus is the disciple of Mind, and then in turn has his own disciples: Tat, Asclepius,

Agathodaimon, and Ammon. Asclepius is the Greek name for the Egyptian god of healing, Imhotep or Imouthes, originally an official in the Third Dynasty that was later deified on account of his great renown in healing, architecture, writing, and astrology. Agathodaimon is the father of Hermes Trismegistus, "the second Hermes," as Manetho called him, and Tat is the son of Hermes. The name Ammon refers to a primeval creator god of the Egyptians, who was identified with the Greek Zeus.

Of note is the fact that tract 15 is strangely missing from the *Corpus*. The numbering typically skips over the missing tract and ends at eighteen for a total of seventeen tracts, as Copenhaver and Salaman have done. Mead, however, has instead inserted "The General Sermon" as tract 2. To account for this he adjusts the numbering on the following tracts to include both the original numbering and his adjusted numbering in parentheses. In this way, according to Mead's translation, tract 14—"A Letter to Asclepius"—becomes the missing tract 15. What "The General Sermon" is we cannot say, for Mead tells us that only the title is preserved, the text itself having disappeared before the *Corpus* came into the hands of Psellus.

The first tractate, "Pæmandres, The Shepherd of Men," provides a foundation of Hermetic cosmogony and eschatology, as well as some essential astrology, while *CH* 3 presents nearly the same cosmogony in a condensed form. The Hermetic cosmogony will be discussed further in part II. "The Cup or Monad," as Mead titles *CH* 4, is a comparatively short treatise that explicates the Oneness of the Source, which is the Monad or the Cup, the Bodiless God who is the cause of all other bodies. Hermes explains to his son and disciple, Tat, that while all men have been given Reason (Logos), they have not all received Mind. Mind is to be found like a prize, placed within a mighty Cup for those who heed the Herald's call to be baptized in gnosis.

It is in the tenth tractate of the *CH*, entitled "The Key," that Hermes presents his discourse to Tat on God, the Father, and the Good. The Good is the creative principle of God. In the Creation of all the things that are, God sends his desire for the Good through the Sun, which generates his children through the Intelligible and Sensible worlds. Of interest is the ebbing and flowing creativity of the maker, to which the individual can surely relate when it comes to the creative process. For sometimes as creators we create nothing, and sometimes we create in abundance, and sometimes we create

with quality, and sometimes in quantity but with little quality. Yet this is contradicted later in the sermon, when Hermes says that the cosmos is continually being created, and creation is the motion of all matter. All forms are subject to evolutionary change and what amounts to a transmigration of souls, by which a human may become like unto God by contemplating the Beauty of the Good. Attachment to vice (viciousness) begins an involutionary movement, into matter, so that the human devolves in its transformations back toward the creeping things, rather than toward deathlessness and godliness. Hermes informs Tat further on the subjects of gnosis and sense (being very different from each other), polarity, matter, Nous, and the headlike Sphere of the Cosmos.

The Definitions of Asclepius Unto King Ammon, or The Perfect Sermon of Asclepius Unto the King (CH 16.17), is a discourse wherein Asclepius defines the Oneness and the Pleroma, or fullness, perfection, and completion of God. The Sun is established as the Demiurge, or God's Craftsman, who receives the Creative Power (tou agathou)²²—a flow of consciousness from God—and disseminates it to Earth. The Sun's essence sustains immortals, mortals, and all things. The emphasis of the Sun's power in this discourse sets it apart from the other tractates in the Corpus Hermeticum, and the veneration of the Sun evinces a strong Egyptian influence.²³ Asclepius also explains the daimons who operate in the lower sphere below the Sun and the gods (the planets) and the zodiacal wheel of destiny. These daimons, as Mead calls them in his translation, are also called demons or spiritual powers;²⁴ their essence is activity, and they can be good, bad, or both good and bad. The human soul has two parts—one above that is rational and beyond the influence of the fate spheres, or the planetary energies and their attendant daimons; and one below that is driven and shaped by the tyranny of the daimons.

It will suffice for now to have given a few examples of the character of the various Hermetic tracts, though a full summary is beyond the scope of this work. We will refer to it throughout the course of this book, however, drawing from the translations of Mead, Copenhaver, and Salaman et al.

The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius

The Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius, also called Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius: Definitions, was discovered more recently in an Armenian translation from the Greek and is thought to date back to the second half of the sixth century CE. The original text is likely as old as the first century, since similarities may be noted between the Definitions and the "Pæmandres," among other philosophical Hermetica, with evidence suggesting the relative antecedence of the Definitions. 25 Many of the treatises of the Corpus Hermeticum expound on ideas presented in the Definitions. G. Quispel, in his article "The Asclepius: From the Hermetic Lodge in Alexandria to the Greek Eucharist and the Roman Mass," calls the Definitions "manuals for meditation," an apt description. They are written as a series of aphorisms that concisely elucidate Hermetic mystical and spiritual truths; each one may be taken on its own for contemplation and meditation. They begin with a cosmological structure describing three worlds: God, Cosmos, and Man. God is the intelligible, immovable, and invisible good that permeates the visible world. Cosmos is the visible and sensible world, and within the sensible world is Man, the destructible and reasonable world, visible and dependent on the invisible for its being (DH) 1). The human being has two natures—mortal and immortal—and three essences: intelligible (soul), animated (spirit), and material (body) (DH 6). Through knowledge (gnosis), the individual has the opportunity to perfect their soul (DH 6), and may even become a god (DH 8). 27

The Asclepius (or Perfect Sermon)

The *Asclepius*, also called the *Perfect Sermon*, is thought to have been written in the second or third century. The most complete version is a Latin translation, but there are also references to the Greek original by other authors, including Lactantius, Johannes Laurentius Lydus, and Stobæus. Of the Greek original, titled "Perfect Discourse," we have only a few fragments and the quotations of the aforementioned authors with which to compare the Latin translation. Parts of the original "Perfect Discourse," written in Coptic, are contained within the Nag Hammadi library, the collection of Gnostic and Hermetic texts discovered in 1945 (*NHC* 6.8). The Latin version of the *Asclepius* has been credited to Apuleius, author of *The Golden Ass*, but this has been controversial. Comparing the Latin and Coptic translations of the Greek original, it is clear that the Latin version

was fairly liberal in its translation, whereas the Coptic remained more true to the original Greek. The *Asclepius* was allegedly the only Hermetic treatise that was known during the Middle Ages. $\frac{31}{2}$

While not part of the *Corpus Hermeticum* proper, the *Perfect Sermon* (or the *Asclepius*) is referred to in *CH* 9, "On Thought and Sense," which begins, "I gave the Perfect Sermon (Logos) yesterday, Asclepius." At the beginning of the *Perfect Sermon* (1.1), Trismegistus tells Asclepius that he is going to deliver a Godly sermon that will be "more Godly than the piety of [ordinary] faith." This text is a discourse between Trismegistus (Thrice-greatest one) and Asclepius (student) at the outset, expanding to include Tat and Ammon, so that there is a "sacred group of four" gathered together in the holy place in "God's goodly presence—to them, sunk in fit silence reverently, their souls and minds pendent on Hermes' lips, thus Love Divine began to speak." No others are allowed to be present for this most sacred teaching, to avoid profaning it by sharing it with the many who are unworthy.

In this sermon Trismegistus teaches the "True Philosophy,—the Pure and Holy [Love]" (14.1);³⁴ that One is All, and All is One; that the Cosmos is One, its Soul is One, and God is One; that the Cosmos consists of the Four Elements—Fire, Water, Earth, and Air; that Heaven rules all bodies; and the Sun and Moon are responsible for all growth and waning. We learn, among other things, that Jupiter is a principle god as the ruler of heaven, that the Sun is a second god and dispenser of blessed light, and that there are thirty-six "horoscopes" (Decans) and seven spheres ruled by Fortune and *Heimarmenē* (fate).

Additionally, the *Asclepius* describes the nature of the holy mystery of divine intercourse between the male and female; the consequences of impiety and how it produces a putrid abscess that gnaws at the soul; and how piety, learning, and knowledge have been given to humanity by God that they may subdue passion and vice. Humans excel beyond the gods, for God has given them a twofold nature as both mortal and immortal, while the gods are only immortal. Humans, like God, may even become divine and create gods of their own. This they do in their own image, just as God created humankind to his own likeness. Thus these idols partake of two natures and are called "holy animals," with the powers of both good and evil, just as their human makers (*Asc. 37*).³⁵

This ability of humans to create gods, and the theurgical rites as described in the *Asclepius*, represents an example of the blurred lines between technical and philosophical Hermetica. The *Asclepius* professes to describe the Egyptian religion and the magical means by which statues of the gods are made to be "ensouled and conscious, filled with spirit and doing great deeds; statues that foreknow the future and predict it by lots, by prophecy, by dreams and by many other means; statues that make people ill and cure them, bringing them pain and pleasure as each deserves" (*Asc.* 24). These gods are considered "earthly," and their power is derived from sympathetic magic or correspondence, using "plants, stones and spices . . . that have in them a natural power of divinity" (*Asc.* 38). Through the use of sacrifices, hymns, praises, and heavenly sounds, the powers of heaven are drawn down into the statue or idol.

Hermes likens Egypt to the image of heaven, or the "temple of the whole world" (*Asc.* 24). Yet despite the holy worship of its people, he makes a prophecy that Egypt will be abandoned by the gods and humanity: "O Egypt, Egypt, of your reverent deeds only stories will survive, and they will be incredible to your children! Only words cut in stone will survive to tell your faithful works, and the Scythian or Indian or some such neighbor barbarian will dwell in Egypt" (*Asc.* 24). A complete desolation of the world is described, as it succumbs to utter depravity, instability, godlessness, and hopelessness. But God sees this desecration and develops a plan, thereby restoring the world. He dispels evil and error through the purifying effects of a great conflagration, war, plague, or flood.

Hermes tells of the goodness of the world, and of the Creator, Jupiter, who rules between heaven and earth. He describes a new city to the west that will be ruled by the "gods who rule the earth" (*Asc.* 27), who according to Mahé and Meyer are likely the Ptolemaic rulers in the city of Alexandria. Hermes speaks of death and the dissolution of the body; upon the soul's leaving of the body, he says, it is met by a great daimon (demon) that resides between earth and heaven and has been appointed by God as judge of human souls. This daimon will assess the life of the soul as having been godly or evil. If evil, the soul will be punished by its own eternal suffering, "swept back and forth between heaven and earth in the streams of matter" (*Asc.* 28). Such suffering after death can be avoided through reverence for god and by uniting the self with the Divine, the love of which

frees the self from its mortal coils and instills within it an abiding trust in its immortality. The discourse continues to describe the lifegiving powers of the cosmos, and the nature of eternity, time, *Heimarmenē*(fate), necessity, and order.

The Excerpts of Stobæus

Included among the writings of the *Hermetica* are the excerpts of Joannes Stobæus, a fifth-century pagan scholar. Stobæus collected the writings of Greek authors (with a notable omission of any Christian authors) and compiled them together for his son, preserving some highly valuable writings that would have otherwise been lost entirely. 42 These excerpts, sometimes called the "Stobaei Hermetica," take the form of dialogues between a teacher and disciple (Hermes and Tat), covering subjects such as piety, matter, time, energy and feeling, providence, necessity, fate, death, and astrology. While most of the excerpts are rather short, "The Virgin of the World," or Koré Kosmou, is quite long comparatively and of a different quality than the rest. This "holiest discourse" is delivered by Isis, or a representative of Isis-Sophia, who "pour(s) forth for Horus the sweet draught (the first) of deathlessness which souls have custom to receive from Gods." By imbibing from this immortal elixir, the newborn Horus is lifted up from ignorance and the amnesia of mortal limitation and initiated into the Hermetic mysteries of the above and below.

The Nag Hammadi Library: Coptic Hermetica

While we are much indebted to Mead for his incomparable effort to compile the Hermetic wisdom and provide a worthy commentary from which we as earnest seekers of the Trismegistic tradition may all benefit by reading, his research preceded the discovery of a very important text known as the "Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth." The following account of its initial finding is summarized from the introduction to Elaine Pagels's book *The Gnostic Gospels*:

In 1945 a collection of Gnostic texts were found by an Arab peasant by the name of Muhammed 'Alī al-Sammān in Upper Egypt, near the town of Naj 'Hammadi, or Nag Hammadi in the English transliteration. While digging for *sabakh*, a fertilizing soil, Muhammed and his brothers struck

upon a red earthenware jar, within which were thirteen leather-bound papyrus books. Many of the pages were burned by Muhammed's mother, who, not realizing what they were, used them as fire starter. The remainder were eventually sold on the black market in Cairo, making their way to the hands of the Egyptian government, who bought one and sent another ten and a half of them to the Coptic Museum in Cairo. The thirteenth codex in large part was sent to America, and later acquired by the Jung Foundation in Zürich at the behest of Professor Gilles Quispel, Quispel, noticing that some of the pages were missing, traveled to the Coptic Museum in Cairo and began to put the pieces together. His research into the texts revealed one of them to be the secret Gospel according to Thomas, with many similar passages to the New Testament, but with different meanings, and the Gospel of Philip and the Apocryphon (or secret book) of John. This volume was only one of the fifty-two texts that remained from the initial find of Muhammed. Quispel dated these texts to about 140 CE, but they were thought to be Coptic translations of even more ancient texts. 44 Included in these fifty-two works was the Hermetic text, the "Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth," that was previously unknown within the surviving *Corpus*. This important text provides a glimpse into the visionary and experiential aspects of Hermetic practice, to be discussed further on.

"The Prayer of Thanksgiving" is a relatively short prayer found as codex six of the Nag Hammadi library, serving as an epilogue to the "Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth." However it originally stood on its own as a prayer to be used as needed or appended to other texts. As such, a version of it concludes the Latin *Asclepius* and was also the ending of a collection of Greek magical writings in the "Papyrus Mimaut." To conclude the "Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth," the "Prayer of Thanksgiving" is a confirmation of the initiation thus received, and a supplication for sustained gnosis. It ends with an instructive note that describes the participants as completing the prayer, embracing, and sitting down to a "bloodless" or "fleshless" meal together (*NHC* 6.7). 46

The "Excerpt from the Perfect Discourse" (Nag Hammadi codex 6) is a Coptic excerpt from the original "Perfect Discourse," of which only a few fragments—translated into Greek—remain. As previously discussed, the Latin *Asclepius* is a complete, though somewhat less accurate translation of "The Perfect Discourse." This excerpt correlates to sections 21–29 of the

Latin *Asclepius*, and as such shares in its entirely different tone from the "Pœmandres" treatise and even from the other Hermetic texts of the Nag Hammadi library. Like the corresponding sections of the *Asclepius*, this excerpt describes the sexual mysteries, role of piety, humanity's superiority to the gods and god-making powers, and the prediction of Egypt's disintigration. Apocalyptic and mournful literature concerning the demise of Egypt is not unique to this treatise, and can be traced back as far as the first intermediate period (2190–2070 BCE) with the *Lamentations of Ipouour*, which recalls the happier days of an Egyptian past, and *Neferty's Prediction* in 2000 BCE, which describes an apocalyptic prediction and subsequent restoration, like our discourse.⁴⁷

Fragments

Many fragments of Hermetic writings were preserved in the writings of the early church fathers: the Christian apologist Justin (*Iustinias*) Martyr, Athenogoras, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Arnobius, Lactantius, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria, and Suidas. Other fragments are found in the works of the philosophers Zosimos, Iamblichus, Julian the Emperor, and Fulgentius the Mythographer. Clement of Alexandria actually documented an entire Egyptian procession involving various participants and forty-two books of Hermes. 48

Thoth and the Ancient Egyptian Roots of the Hermetic Tradition



Do you not know, Asclepius, that Egypt is an image of heaven or, to be more precise, that everything governed and moved in heaven came down to Egypt and was transferred there? If truth were told, our land is the temple of the whole world.

—HERMES, FROM BRIAN COPENHAVER'S

HERMETICA

IF THE HERMETIC TRADITION WERE conceptualized as a tree growing through time, then its roots would lie in the "black land" of ancient Egypt, its trunk in the Hellenistic era of Greco-Egyptian culture, and its branches would be seen spreading out across the centuries, encompassing the entire Western Esoteric tradition and all of its occult and metaphysical expressions. From above, the tree is a circle—its various levels perceived as a whole, from the ancient pagan roots to the budding branches of new growth appearing as Hermeticism continues to evolve.

The roots of Hermeticism and the Western Esoteric tradition, while deeply entwined with Gnosticism and early Christianity, predate these religions and reach back into Egypt's Pre-Dynastic period. Beginning roughly 6000 BCE, the mythical founder of the Hermetic art, known as the Egyptian god Thoth, was already being worshipped. It was Thoth, god of

writing, wisdom, and magic, that initially transmitted the Hermetic teachings to humanity. As previously mentioned, this deity, worshipped from the earliest times, later became identified with the Greek Hermes during the Hellenistic fusion of Greek and Egyptian cultures.

In the "holiest discourse" of the *Hermetica*, "The Virgin of the World" or *Koré Kosmou* (*Stob*. 23), Isis describes the Golden Age before humanity existed upon the earth, when there were only the gods brought forth by the Creator, immortal but still immersed in the mystery of creation, unenlightened and without knowledge of God. So God, desiring to enlighten his creation and to be known, breathed into the gods, or godlike men, the desire and the power to know him. Of these gods there existed an all-knowing being named Hermes who held the divine knowledge and the power to transmit it; he engraved it on stones and hid it away for the ages to come and seek it out. Hermes recited a spell to make the books of wisdom "unseeable, unfindable, for every one whose foot shall tread the plains of this [our] land, until old Heaven doth bring forth meet instruments for you, whom the Creator shall call souls." Thus the books are hidden away in the soul and only recoverable through gnosis.

Thoth, also called *Tehuti* or *Djehuti*, is often portrayed as a man with the head of an ibis wearing a crescent moon and disk, or sometimes as a dogheaded baboon (an assimilation of the ancient god, Asten). The derivation of the name Tehuti is *tehu*, the Egyptian word for ibis, and the suffix *ti*, meaning "he who is endowed with the sacred powers of the ibis." Another derivation for the name *Tehuti* comes from the word *tekh*, meaning "weight," which was represented by the sign for heart. The ibis was drawn by the Egyptians where the word *heart* was meant, perhaps alluding to Thoth as the one who presides over the weighing of the heart in the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

The ibis, balancing in meditative stillness upon one leg, is a wading bird; it stands between worlds. Poised upon one slender leg, halfway in the water, talons sinking into the muddy underworld, the ibis is intently focused and awaits its prey. It is a creature both in touch with the depths of instinct as a hunter, and also imbued with wings to fly into the heavens. In ancient Egypt it was the white ibis that was considered to be the sacred ibis (*ibis religiosa*) and the physical incarnation of Thoth, and thus these birds were often mummified and placed in tombs and in the necropolis of Hermopolis,

the city also known as *Khmunu/Khemmenu* (modern Al-Ashmūnayn in Upper Egypt), where Thoth was worshipped. The crested ibis was used as a hieroglyph meaning "to be radiant," and also as a metaphor for transfiguration, suggesting the enlightening and transformative powers of Thoth. $\frac{4}{}$



Fig. 2.1. The ancient Egyptian deity Thoth. Relief carving from the Temple of Ramses II (1279–1213 BCE), Abydos.

Courtesy of Olaf Tausch and Wikimedia Commons.

Thoth was a self-begotten god and the Creator of the world, emerging upon a lotus flower at the dawn of time; created by the power of utterance, he was also the inventor of speech. He was the "heart of Ra," the sun god, defending Ra's solar barque and retrieving the eye of Ra when it had escaped, and as a reward Ra created the Moon for Thoth. Thus Thoth is associated with the White Disk of the Moon as the "governor of the living star-gods," or the "Bull Among the Stars." With the movement of the Moon and stars, Thoth is "Measurer of Time," and he is attributed with inventing mathematics, astronomy, and engineering. As the Lord of Magic he taught King Osiris the arts of civilization, and he taught Isis the spells that she used to restore Osiris to life and cure Horus of his diseases in youth. Thoth's position as the Great Magician is naturally derived from his invention of writing, for which he was known as the Master of the Words of God. His book of magic, a forty-two-volume text said to contain all the wisdom of the world, was used in courts of law in the Eighteenth Dynasty. 5

As the inventor of writing, Thoth was the scribe or the messenger of the gods. Hence, when the ancient Greeks came into contact with the Egyptians, they identified Thoth with their own god Hermes, said to be an ancient sage attributed with writing sacred doctrines on magic, alchemy, astrology, and philosophy. Hermes also shared a lunar association with Thoth, and Thoth's role as Osiris's protector and guide to the deceased was related to Hermes as a conductor of souls. The two gods were syncretized and worshipped in conjunction in the Hellenistic period at the Temple of Thoth in Khemmenu. The name *Hermes Trismegistus*, or "Thrice-Greatest Hermes," was used to indicate his multivalent powers and the three principles ubiquitous in Nature (Body, Mind, and Soul), or the three levels of Nature (mineral, vegetable, animal). It may also apply to the three personified aspects of Hermes, which are the Roman Mercury, the Greek Hermes, and the Egyptian Thoth. As the Roman god Mercury, he is the messenger of the gods with winged feet conveying messages between the

realm of humanity and that of the gods, which is to say between higher and lower aspects of the Mind.

EGYPTIAN TRANSMISSION

The ancient Hermetic teachings of Egypt originally spread to Greece by way of the philosophers who made expeditions to Egypt to be initiated into the mysteries, including Orpheus, Democritus, Plato, Pythagoras, and Eudoxus. Among the earliest of these was the mythical and enchanting Orpheus (ca. 725–675 BCE), attributed with writing the Orphic hymns. Diodorus tells us that Orpheus traveled to Egypt, which would have had a great influence on the development of Orphic cosmogony in which Dionysus, an agrarian god of death and rebirth, like the Egyptian Osiris, played a key role. A little later, Pythagoras of Samos (ca. 570–495 BCE), the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, having traveled in Phoenicia and received initiation into the mysteries of Byblos and Tyre, traveled to Egypt where these sacred rites had their origin, immersing himself in the wisdom of the Egyptian priests. The Neoplatonic philosopher Iamblichus (ca. 242– 325 CE), disciple of Porphyry, asserted that the philosophies of Plato and Pythagoras were developed from the "ancient pillars of Hermes." Plutarch writes that Pythagoras copied the Egyptian symbols and occult teachings, and as a result his teachings reflect the enigmatic hieroglyphic writings. ⁹ A great portion of his life, twenty-two years according to Iamblichus, was spent amid the temples of Egypt, studying geometry and astronomy and being initiated into the ancient mysteries, after which he spent another twelve years of study in Babylon before returning to Samos. 10 As a testament to Pythagoras's Hermetic initiation, he is praised as having "a greater gift of God and of Wisdom than was granted to anyone after Hermes," and described as "a disciple of the disciples by the grace of thrice-great Hermes" in the *Turba Philosophorum* (the Assembly of the Philosophers), an Arabic treatise of philosophical and alchemical discourse (ca. 900 CE). 12

Plato (ca. 428/427–348/347 BCE), who was greatly influenced by Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Socrates, was also believed to have traveled to Egypt. The Pythagorean influence is evidenced in his ideas relating to immortality, Orphism, and attention to mathematics and music. 13

The writings of the *Hermetica* are deeply reminiscent of Plato's writings, particularly his *Timaeus*, and then somewhat modified by the philosophies of the Stoics. Likely written by Pythagoreans and Platonists, the *Hermetica* are imbued with the teachings of the ancient Egyptian priests as transmitted through these Greek philosophers.

Mead, citing the work of Reitzenstein, points to the relationship between the cosmogenesis presented in the "Pæmandres" treatise (*CH* 1) and an Egyptian inscription dated to the eighth century BCE. 15 Yet the inscription itself states that it is reproduced from an even older text from the temple of Ptah in Memphis. The Osiris myth is identified in the inscription; however the primary figure is Ptah the Great, the "heart and tongue of the god-circle," who is also identified with "Thoth the Wise." As Demiurge and the Creative Power, Ptah's name was attached to the Ogdoad, a group of eight deities that emanate from the one Supreme God, Atum. This is comparable with the eight spheres of the "Pæmandres." The inscription represents an early syncretism of Atum-Ptah-Thoth and the conception of God as a plurality of eight emanations, the "god-circle."

In Mead's comparison of this earlier Egyptian inscription with the "Pæmandres," Thoth, who completes the order of the cosmos and is then atoned (unified) with Ptah, is the logos of the "Pæmandres" that completes the cosmic ordering and is then atoned with the Demiurgic Mind. In his estimation, Mead asserts that the likeness of these cosmological conceptions is too strong to be considered mere chance, and that the Hermetic writings of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, particularly the "Pæmandres," are definitively rooted in ancient Egypt. 16

There were, of course, other influences in the *Hermetica*, such as the Book of Genesis showing a Jewish influence in *CH* 1 and *CH* 3, though there is little else to suggest that the Jews had much influence on the *Corpus*. Neither did Christianity seem to have much to do with the *Hermetica*, and in fact, where the Christians are mentioned (*Asc.* 3) they are spoken of inimically. Further, while we may find the roots of Hermeticism in the soils of the Nile, we do not know where the seed from which they sprouted may have originated. Perhaps the seed is to be found in the legendary city of Atlantis, which Plato writes about in his *Timaeus* and *Critias*. Within contemporary New Age circles there are stories pertaining to Thoth "the Atlantean" that attribute his existence as a living person—a

priest king—to this mythical city. Like the aforementioned first and second Hermes described by Manetho, the Arabs also described the "first" Hermes who lived before the Flood. He was the first astrologer and preserved the ancient science from destruction by carving it into the temple walls of Akhmim. 19

If we consider that Thoth is the Mind, then his teachings have been with us from the beginning in one form or another. In any case, we see that the Egyptian mysteries permeated pre-classical and classical Greece, deeply influencing the philosophers of that age. The teachings of Hermes then played a major role in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, experiencing resurgence in the philosophies of Neopythagoreanism, Middle Platonism, and Neoplatonism during the Renaissance.

The Hermetic Bole Hellenistic and Roman Periods



If you rise beyond yourself, an image rising to its model, you have reached the goal of your journey.

—PLOTINUS

ASCENDING FROM THE DEPTHS OF Hermeticism's roots in ancient Egypt, we rise up to find the bole of our tree forming in the Hellenistic world. Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and lasting until the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, the Hellenistic period was a confluence of diverse cultures, religions, and philosophies as Hellenic (Greek) culture spread from the eastern Mediterranean to Northeast Africa, Persia, Mesopotamia, and South Asia. The Macedonian kingdom established by Alexander's conquests included three powerful dynasties: the Ptolemies (Egypt), the Seleucids (Syria and Persia), and the Antigonids (Greece and Macedonia). In these dynasties, Egyptian, Chaldean (Babylonians and Assyrians), Syrian and Persian, Asian and other cultures intermingled in what was the original "melting pot." It was a time of experimentation and change in the areas of philosophy, magic, religion, science, art, literature, and politics. Kings ruled with absolute authority and were greatly concerned with amassing riches from throughout the Hellenistic world and from India and the Far East. As a display of their wealth they funded the building of great museums, palaces, zoos, works of art and sculpture, and created libraries, including the renowned library of Alexandria.

Multicultural cities, like Alexandria, became the meeting grounds for diverse ideologies. This blending of cultures had both positive and negative implications, however. The Greeks, though dominant and holding a superior view of themselves above the "barbarians," were immigrants outnumbered by the local indigenous populations. Segregation, both social and cultural, was embedded in Hellenistic kingdoms. Tensions between ethnic groups were in evidence, and non-Greeks were denied citizenship and made to live in separate areas. Much like in our own time, however, amid the interracial conflicts, class inequalities, and the inherent racism of social and political systems, there were those who embraced the multicultural opportunity to expand the human understanding of nature, the cosmos, and humanity's relationship to God.

HELLENISTIC SYNCRETISM

During the Hellenistic period, Greek gods were syncretized with Egyptian gods, often for political and social reasons, sometimes giving them increased potentialities and powers and sometimes detracting from their previous authority. From this emerged the Greco-Egyptian god Hermanubis, a combination of the Egyptian and Greek psychopomps Anubis and Hermes. Osiris came to be identified with the Greek god Dionysus (the Roman Bacchus) to become Dionysus-Osiris or Osiris-Dionysus, a favored syncretism of the dying gods in Ptolemaic Egypt. Serapis, a fusion of Osiris and Hapi (the Apis Bull), whose cult worship centered in the Ptolemies, was given the attributes of the Greek Zeus, Aesculapius, Dionysus, Pluto, and Kronos. We learn from Tacitus that Serapis was introduced and given powerful influence in Alexandria by Ptolemy I Soter for official religious purposes.

Babylonian mythology was likewise introduced to the Greeks during this time, as were the dualistic Zoroastrian beliefs and even to a certain extent Buddhism.³ The Babylonians made a formidable impression upon the Greeks, particularly in the subjects of astrology and magic. The Greek mind was ripe to receive this wisdom, impressed by the antiquity of the Babylonian priestly records and their ability to predict eclipses. However, it was the Egyptian religion that made the most profound impact upon Hellenistic theology, as evidenced by the extent to which Egyptian religion

is referenced in Greek literature, as opposed to the few regarding Babylonian, Persian, or Syrian.⁴

These two primary influences, Egyptian and Chaldean, differed in a major way. While the Egyptian religion was primarily focused on the afterlife and rituals and spells for the dying, the Babylonians placed more emphasis on applying their magic, astrology, and divination to ensuring prosperity and well-being in this lifetime. In the Hellenistic age, Hermetism stood at the crossroads of three primary cultures: Greek, Egyptian, and Chaldean. The ancient teachings of Hermes arrived as a unifying mystical philosophy and religious practice, or rite of initiation, that naturally encompassed the philosophical reasoning of the Greek mind, the preparation for the afterlife as the Egyptians cultivated, and the theurgical approach to the improvement of one's life in the here and now, as practiced by the Babylonians.

HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Philosophers of the Hellenistic period were less concerned with politics than they had been in the previous period as the city-states gave way to Macedonian kingdoms. For the average person it was the private life that predominated over the public and political, and the philosophies of the time addressed the questions of a broader populace. The philosophies of Plato and Aristotle represented the affluent and politically involved, with the primary question being how to create a good state. In the Hellenistic period the question became one of a more personal nature, asking how a person may aspire to virtuosity and happiness in a world of depravity and suffering.

Of the four philosophical schools that arose in the Hellenistic age—Stoicism, Epicureanism, Cynicism, and Skepticism—it was the Stoics that aligned most closely with the developing Hermetic school of thought. The Stoic concept of the logos was of prime importance in Hellenistic theology and to Hermetism. The active and passive principles of the universe, in the forms of God and Nature, respectively, are easily recognized in Hermetic thought. According to Zeno of Citium (ca. 336–264 BCE), the founder of Stoicism, the universe was ruled by natural laws, all things having emerged

from fire and all things returning to fire in a cosmic conflagration, as the process of creation and destruction recur over and again for eternity.⁷

The logos, being the active principle, or the reason and mind of God, was related to Thoth and Hermes, the "heart" and "tongue" of Ra and the Creative Word. On the other hand, Nehe-maut was the personification of nature (substance, matter), the passive principle that is continually created and destroyed. Together Thoth and Nehe-maut maintain the cosmic order and universal law. God, being integrated with the whole of nature and present throughout the fabric of the cosmos, was not separate from the world, as contrasted with the Christian theology and Aristotelian concepts of God as an incorporeal being or prime mover (*primum movens*). 10

The Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, or Philo Judaeus, was influenced by Platonism, Neopythagoreanism, and Stoicism, though he was not affiliated with any particular philosophy. For him the logos was more like the creative faculty of God in which polarities expressed themselves, while God existed in unity. The Stoic philosophy, however, saw no distinction between the logos and God's transcendence. This materialist perspective asserted that attaining virtue is to be in harmony with nature, having one's will in alignment with natural causes. Regardless of what ills and atrocities may befall us, it is possible to maintain one's virtue, which is the only good, because virtue is derived from the will that is in harmony with nature.

THE ROMAN PERIOD: NEOPYTHAGOREANISM, MIDDLE PLATONISM, AND NEOPLATONISM

Neopythagoreanism, beginning in the first century BCE and flourishing in the first and second centuries CE, coexisted with Middle Platonism, each influencing the other and playing a prominent role in the continuation and evolution of Hermetic thought. Of particular importance in this regard were the Neopythagorean concepts surrounding number symbolism, the Monad (relating to Stoic philosophy) and the Dyad (relating to Platonic philosophy), the moral precepts contained in the *Golden Verses*, the human being as microcosm, and the immortality of the soul. Apollonius of Tyana

(16–100 CE), Philo of Alexandria (ca. 30 BCE–45 CE) and Plutarch of Chaeronea (ca. 45–125 CE) are notable examples of the Middle Platonists.

Plutarch understood all religions of his time to be diverse expressions of one eternal truth, which he demonstrated through the use of allegory in *De Iside et Osiride* ("Concerning Isis and Osiris"), an important text of Greco-Egyptian syncretism, to which we owe much of our knowledge of the myth of Isis and Osiris. The logos he likened to both the transcendent mind of god, and as the immanent body of Osiris, cyclically dismembered by Typhon and reconstructed by Isis. 14 The Orphic version of this is given by Macrobius, in which he refers to Dionysus as the "Hylic Nous," "which after its birth from the Indivisible [Mind] is itself divided into individual [minds]." 15

Neoplatonism formed as a mystico-religious philosophy from the syncretization of Platonic philosophies and Gnostic, Christian, Jewish, and pagan Hermetic influences. It began around the beginning of the third century with the philosopher Ammonius Saccas (175–242 CE) in Alexandria, where he started a philosophical school in 193 CE. Yet everything we know about Neoplatonism comes to us not through Ammonius, but through his student Plotinus (205–270 CE), and of Plotinus we must rely on the writings of his student, Porphyry (234–305 CE), who later compiled his works into *The Enneads*.

Plotinus was born in Egypt and studied in Alexandria, where he lived until the age of thirty-nine. After a brief and failed expedition with the emperor Gordian III against the Persians, which Plotinus joined with the desire to study Eastern religions, he ended up in Rome where he settled and began teaching his philosophies. Porphyry, in editing and arranging the writings of Plotinus, added a much more Pythagorean influence to Neoplatonism, bringing in a more supernatural quality. 16

The most fundamental metaphysical teaching of Plotinus is his concept of the holy trinity that forms a system of emanation from Source and a return aspiration to Source, an outflow from Divinity as all of Existence, and an inflow of Existence back to Divinity. This trinity is made up of three "Hypostases," as he calls them, by which he means first principles. They are often related to the three "Persons" (First, Second, and Third Person) of the Christian Trinity; however unlike the Christian Trinity, they are ordered from the One Supreme and then descending levels of eminence. ¹⁷ First

comes the One, then Nous, then the Soul. Plotinus concedes that this hypostatic triad is not a new conception, but that Plato's triplicity was the earlier foundation for the idea in antiquity.

Essential to Neoplatonic philosophy was the immortality of the soul, which exists as an emanation of the transcendent One. This One is limitless, unmoving, and unbegotten, yet emanates the cosmos from its own overflowing effulgence. Thus arises the Intelligence, the image of the One, existent in the intelligible realm as both a unity and a multiplicity. The Soul, within which are the many souls, is born from the Intelligence. The One, from its effortless Being, emanates various spheres, each one increasingly less perfect and divided, ending with the furthest sphere from the Source, which manifests as the material world and its extreme differentiation. Here it is that the human soul finds itself in a fallen state, separated from its Source and having acquired, in its descent into the body and passage through the spheres, various irrational qualities. Yet in Plotinus's conception, each individual soul has an earthly part that draws it downward toward the Sensible world, and a higher part directed toward the Intelligible.

The Supreme, the Source, or Divinity, from which existence emanates, Plotinus called "the One" "the Good," or the "First Existent." It is also sometimes called "God," sometimes "the Father," "the Simple," "the Absolute," "the Transcendence," "the Infinite," or "the Unconditioned." There is not much to be said about it, because it defies human language to explain. While it is omnipresent, it is at the same time nowhere to be found. It transcends the All and is transcendent even beyond the role of Creator, for that role of First-Cause is of a lower level of existence than the One. Yet the cosmos emerges as an effortless act of generation from the One, which is itself ineffable and experiences itself as itself only. This generation begets the Second "Hypostases" (Person) of the Divine Triad. 18

The Second Person is that which Plotinus calls Nous, which has been called the Divine Mind, Divine Intelligence, or Divine Intellection, otherwise called the Intellectual-Principle by Stephen MacKenna in his translation of *The Enneads*. Nous, as the Divine Mind of the First, represents the first expressive act of the One, through which the One now perceives itself as Other. Essentially, Nous is the vision of the One. It is the first true principle, which represents the Dyad because it is divided within

itself and gives way to duality and to a multiplicity of forms. This is the realm of spiritual thoughts or ideas, or the lesser gods, the Intelligences and archetypes, angels and spirits, and the entire cosmos in its ideal thoughtform.

Divine Intellect, or Nous, is organized into thoughts or Forms, from which emerge the Soul, the Third Person, when the Nous is able to realize its thought, which is to say, to create it. So Creation, while rooted in the One as the Source, is the act of Nous. The Third Hypostases (Person) of the Divine Triad is called by Plotinus the "All-Soul," "Universal Soul," or "Soul of the All." While the Second Person is the image of the First, the Third Person is the image of the Second, the image of the "Divine Intellect." In other words, "soul is an utterance of the Intellectual-Principle," while Nature is the result of the Soul's creative act.

The Soul breathes life into all living creatures, all the stars, and even the Sun. Things may come and go from this world in accordance with the Soul and whither it may go, but the Soul is eternal and cannot abandon itself. Further, it is the aim, or the innate desire, of the Soul to return to its origins in the Supreme, the One and First, to bring itself to union with the Good. Plotinus counsels a twofold approach in order for the Soul to be returned to the origins: first, to show the Soul the things it deems honorable to be dishonorable; and second, to teach or remind it of its worth. He adds that the recollection of the true worth of the Soul takes precedence, and when perceived, illuminates the low worth of the things in this world. 21

On the question of how the Second Hypostases may have arisen from the Supreme One, Plotinus emphasizes the immobility of the Supreme, comparing the self-emanation of the One to be like the emanations of the Sun. While the Sun generates an aura of brilliant emanations that flow ceaselessly from it, its "selfsameness" remains unchanged, and so it is with the radiant generation of the One. In the same way, these emanations are never truly separate from the One; only in the sense that it is distinct from the One. If the Soul seeks to know itself and its origins, it peers back or inward through the "chain of being" to perceive the Divine Mind, Nous, or the Intellectual-Principle. Then, through the mediation of that principle, the Soul may glimpse the One. As pointed out by Paul Henry in his introduction to MacKenna's translation, not only is the sage of Neoplatonism a "monad" in their pursuit of happiness through seeking God,

but salvation itself has already been achieved. It is latent within the soul, so that the sage need only turn inward and realize their true being. 25

HERMETISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

Hermetism and Christianity were reconciled by the early church fathers and Christian apologists, who saw Hermes as a prophet of the Christ. They pointed to the Supreme One, residing above the lesser gods, as evidence that Hermetism was monotheistic despite its polytheistic appearance. However other Christian writers, particularly Augustine, condemned Hermetism as pagan idolatry, pointing specifically to the *Asclepius* and its passages about demons, which displayed the erroneous and heretical beliefs of the Hermetists.

It is generally stated that Hermetism was relatively unknown in the Middle Ages, and that the *Asclepius* was the only Hermetic text known during this time. However, as Florian Ebeling points out, this is not entirely accurate. Other texts, like the *Book of Twenty-four Philosophers*, and various writings on astrology attributed to Hermes were also circulating in this period. Yet the influence of Hermetism was less prominent in the Middle Ages than it had previously been. What we do see during this time is a rich tradition of astrology, magic, and alchemy, much of which could be considered technical Hermetica. Hermetic literature was transmitted and translated in large part by the Arabs beginning with their settlement in Egypt in the seventh century, and later introduced into Germany in the fourteenth century.

Interest in Neoplatonism and Hermetism spread across Europe during the Renaissance with the rise of Humanism. It has been the general trend in the historiography of Hermetism to attribute Ficino's Latin translations of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Plato, and Plotinus to the rise in Hermetism's popularity during the Renaissance. However, Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2018) asserts that this widely promulgated idea, begun with Frances A. Yates, has been discredited. Evidently the individuals said to be at the core of this tradition—Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and Giordano Bruno—are not Hermeticists, but rather Platonic Orientalists whose interests lay in

Egyptian, Persian, or Hebrew teachings. 28 Platonic Orientalism is a term referring to the ancient Eastern origins of Plato's teachings relating to the salvation of the soul. Hanegraaff wrote that Platonic Orientalism had several forms: Zoroastrian (Persian), Mosaic (Hebrew), and Hermetic (Egyptian). 49 Apparently, Ficino himself adhered to the Zoroastrian source of Platonic Orientalism. 30

It was Ludovico Lazzarelli (1447–1500), along with his spiritual teacher Giovanni da Correggio (ca. 1451 to post-1503), that were at the core of the Hermetic tradition that flourished in the Renaissance. Lazzarelli, who was more focused on Hermes and the Bible than Plato evidenced, translated a number of the Hermetic texts and wrote his own Christian Hermetic dialogue called the *Crater Hermetis*. This latter work had a profound influence on Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, particularly Lazzarelli's doctrine of "deification through gnosis," which posits that attaining true knowledge deifies the human being and allows them to share in God's creative power. Description of "deification through gnosis" which posits that attaining true knowledge deifies the human being and allows them to share in God's creative power.

The New Platonic Academy of Florence in the fifteenth century was an epicenter of a revival of Hermetic teachings and ancient pagan philosophies. During this time the idea of a universal or perennial philosophy (*pansophia* or *philosophia perennis*) that could be traced back to the ancients and their legacy of wisdom captivated the minds of scholars and philosophers. Hermes played an essential role in this perennial philosophy. As the alleged author of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Hermes was considered a contemporary of Moses, and thus one of the Judaeo-Christian tradition's founding fathers. 33

Schools of occult thought including Hermetism, Jewish Kabbalah,*1 alchemy, astrology, and *magia* (philosophy of Nature) arose to address a growing interest in these subjects. Syncretic scholars drew on ancient texts, including material from the Hellenistic theologies and philosophies of Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism, Neopythagoreanism, Gnosticism, Hermetic literature, and the Stoa, with a general trend toward synthesis. Added to this extant body of religious and philosophical source material was the discovery by European scholars of the Jewish Kabbalah. Christian thinkers interpreted the Kabbalah with the desire to harmonize the two, giving rise to Christian Kabbalah, one of the currents of Renaissance Hermeticism that

has also become known as Hermetic Kabbalah, an important part of Renaissance magic. 34

Hermetic magic during the Renaissance was greatly influenced by the god-making rites described in the *Asclepius* as well as another wellcirculated book of Hermetic magic from the Middle Ages, called *Picatrix*, a classic text of philosophical and practical magic. Both of these works were sources for the work of Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Ludovico Lazzarelli, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, Giordano Bruno, and others. The third book of Ficino's *De Vita*, called *The Book "On Obtaining Life from the Heavens,"* is his most magical work in which he describes the sympathetic magic that draws the spiritual essence down from the higher realms into the material world. Pico, a preeminent Jewish scholar, took Ficino's natural magic even further with the magic of Hermetic Kabbalah, a practical and theological magic that has been of great importance to the evolution of Hermetic magic and Qabalism in the centuries to follow, including in the works of Agrippa, Thrithemius, and John Dee, among many others.

Efforts at harmonizing various traditions were at the heart of Renaissance Hermeticism, in particular Egyptian, Christian, Jewish, and Greek traditions. Faivre suggests that these various traditions were thought of like keys on one unified instrument, which could be played to elicit harmonies of wisdom; ³⁷ this syncretic movement he calls "neo-Alexandrian Hermetism," which developed alongside Christian Kabbalah, Paracelsianism and the alchemical tradition, *philosophica occulta* and theurgy, Rosicrucianism, and Christian Theosophy. ³⁸

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

In the early seventeenth century, the antiquity and validity of the Hermetic teachings were brought into question with the work of the Calvinist Isaac Casaubon, who in 1614 revealed that the Hermetic writings originated in the first three centuries of the Common Era, and that they were little more than regurgitations of Platonic and biblical sources. Casaubon, well studied in Christianity, found many parallels between Christian sources and passages in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Those teachings that were not derived from scripture he pointedly attributed to the Greek philosophers, and went

so far as to call Hermes a "fake Mercury" and the writings of the *Corpus* forgeries. 40 Protestant scholars accepted his contemptible argument against the Hermetic writings being of Egyptian origin, and this view was supported in the academic world into the early twentieth century. 41 Frances A. Yates considers Casaubon's dating of the *Corpus Hermeticum* to be a desicive blow to Renaissance Neoplatonism and magic, marking the end of the Renaissance. 42

However the legacy of Hermes was not altogether destroyed by Casaubon's arguments against the antique origins of the *Corpus*. There were those who simply ignored Casaubon and carried forth the Renaissance reverence for Hermes Trismegistus, as in the case of Athanasius Kircher and Robert Fludd, and others whose Hermetic conceptions were greatly affected by Casaubon's arguments, namely the Cambridge Platonists Ralph Cudworth and Henry More. As to the dating of the *Corpus*, Cudworth argued that Casaubon's assessment was only relevant to a few of the tractates, and that Casaubon had failed to acknowledge their diversity, an error likely promulgated by Ficino's translation, which presented the various distinct books as being chapters of one and the same book, the "Poemandres."

Despite the opposition to Casaubon's critiques, Hermeticism had lost its momentum, but received a boost in the eighteenth century from P. E. Jablonski in *Pantheon Aegyptiorum* (1750–52). While not defending the *Corpus* itself, he pointed to the sacred books of Hermes that were ritually memorized by the Egyptian priests, as documented by Clement of Alexandria, to defend the sanctity of Egyptian knowledge. 45

As we have previously pointed out, while the tracts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* were steeped with Greek philosophy, those very philosophers had been known for their travels and studies in Egypt, and they were clearly influenced by what they learned from the Egyptian priests. Salaman notes how the Egyptian theurgy, specifically the "opening of the mouth" ceremony, is reflected in the *Corpus* as well as in the technical Hermetica. The *Corpus* also shares in the Egyptian theurgical self-identification with the gods in order to obtain their favor, as shown in the *Definitions* (8.7) and CH(5.11).

Interest in the Hermetica began to bubble up again in the late 1800s and early 1900s with the English translations of J. D. Chambers, William Wynn Wescott, Walter Scott, André-Jean Festugière, G. R. S. Mead, and the works of Richard Reitzenstein. 47 Much of this occurred in conjunction with the Theosophical movement, the work of the Rosicrucians, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and in the occult sciences of astrology, magic, and alchemy.

The Three Branches of Hermeticism



Above in Heaven, son, the Gods do dwell, o'er whom with all the rest doth rule the Architect of all; and in the Æther [dwell] the Stars, o'er whom the mighty Light-giver the Sun holds sway; but in the Air [live] only souls, o'er whom doth rule the Moon; and on the Earth [do dwell] men and the rest of living things, o'er whom he who doth happen to be king holds sway.

—Isis to Horus, "Virgin of the World"

NOW THAT WE'VE ESTABLISHED THE ROOT and trunk of our Hermetic tree, let us define the major branches arising therefrom. Hermes Trismegistus, or Thrice Great, was said to have revealed three branches of the Hermetic tradition. While the Hermetica are primarily theological and philosophical, they incorporate aspects of these three branches, which were all present in their early forms in the Hellenistic period and have grown in distinct ways through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and into modern times. These three branches are astrology—the operation of the stars; magic or theurgy—the operation of the Moon; and alchemy—the operation of the Sun. Though these branches overlap and share in the basic Hermetic philosophy, cosmology, soteriology, and eschatology, they each have distinct traditions and practices that have emerged from them.

The relationship between alchemy and astrology, particularly in the Middle Ages, is somewhat ambiguous. There was among medieval alchemists a general disdain or disregard for astrology, and in fact the two disciplines were regarded as distinct from one another. While alchemy relates the planets to the seven metals: lead (Saturn), tin (Jupiter), iron (Mars), gold (Sol), quicksilver (Mercury), and silver (Luna), many alchemical manuscripts rely on a simplified astrology, primarily focusing on conducting operations on the day and in the hour of the corresponding planet, leaving out the complexities of aspects, angles, horoscopes, and elections. Alchemy was considered astronomia inferior or astronomia terrestris in the Middle Ages, signifying that it was in part related to astronomy and astrology, but not directly dependent on it.² However, astrology is present in traditional Hermetism, as well as theurgy and alchemy. Practicing alchemy, whether spiritual or operative, with an understanding of the celestial influences and correspondences will only benefit the results of the art, deepening the alchemist's appreciation of relationships between the microcosm and macrocosm.

In the art of theurgy, astrology is more quintessential, though it takes on a more active character than the astrology of casting horoscopes. Theurgy is the art of invoking divine energies to intercede in human affairs, and ultimately to facilitate henosis, or divine union with the One, the Source, the Supreme, the Monad, or God. It may involve specific rituals and operations that rely on astrological timing, natural correspondences, and incantations, prayers, or petitions to the planetary gods. Theurgy, understood as a beneficent magic, can be said to be simply an aspect of Hermes himself, attributed with bringing magic to humanity. Magic touches upon a pivotal relationship between human and divine will, providing a solution to the problem of fate (Heimarmenē) or fortune. Astrological cosmic determinism is countered by the ability of the magician to exert their will and elicit the aid of the gods, or the planets, to change destiny. Hermetic theurgy rests upon an understanding of astrology, fundamental to Hermetic cosmology, as is evidenced by references to the zodiac and the planetary spheres throughout Hermetic writings.

A magician unaware of planetary and zodiacal timing, or at the very least the cycles of the Moon, is ignoring one of the most important factors in conducting successful rituals. It can be argued as well that in astrology,

without magic and the art of alchemical transmutation, one is simply at the mercy of fate, the daimons. Theurgy and alchemy are practices that aid the initiate in overcoming the seven spheres and ascending to the eighth, the level of the Divine Mind. Alchemy, which explores the relationship between consciousness and matter, or the One and the Multiplicity, is related to both theurgy and astrology. The alchemist applies their will, sometimes in conjunction with astrological timing, communion with divinities, correspondences, and natural planetary to transmutations of matter and spirit. It is both an inward and an outward expression of the union between God and the human being. Alchemy and Hermetism are so intimately connected and share so much overlap in their philosophies and historical development that it is difficult to separate them into two distinct traditions, yet alchemical texts themselves vary from being more spiritual and philosophical to more practical, with specific alchemical recipes and instructions.

Through transmuting the planetary energies, which alchemically are related to the seven metals, one purifies and refines the self. Magical rituals and spells may be of benefit on a very material level, for the attainment of wealth, status, goods, or love, which may be removed from any theological or spiritual goals. However, magic can be used to sensitize the body to the subtle energies within and surrounding it, and to activate the "light-body." Magic is a potent way to connect with the planetary daimons in order to integrate their energetic and archetypal patterns, through the invocation of corresponding deities and the trance-inducing qualities of ritual. The magician is a master of their personal will and their consciousness, one who has aligned with Divine Will and thus understands the art of creation.

Imagination is integral to each of the branches of Hermeticism, for it is the medium through which the human mind perceives the world; and in the Hermetic conception, it is the way in which the world is created. Hanegraaff, in discussing the imagination in esoteric romanticism, lists four ways in which the imagination may be understood in different esoteric contexts: "(1) The power of visualizing images for magical purposes; (2) the faculty by which images and symbols (for instance, in alchemy) may become vehicles of inner transformation or transmutation; (3) the faculty that gives access to a 'mesocosmos' or 'mundus imaginalis' that is in between the world of the senses and the world of pure spirit; (4) the process of 'internalizing the cosmos,' described for example in the eleventh tract of

the *Corpus Hermeticum* and of fundamental importance to the celebrated 'Art of Memory.'"

We can see how these various faculties apply to the three branches of Hermeticism. In the operation of the Moon (theurgy), imagination is primarily used in the first context to visualize specific images in ritual and extending to the magic of manifestation. Whereas in the operation of the Sun (alchemy), imagination is employed in inner transmutations, facilitated by correspondence and the symbolic language of the art. Astrologically, in the operation of the stars, the imagination in the third and fourth contexts above serves to place us in the roles of the gods, to explore within our own internal landscape the mythologies, cosmogonies, theogonies, and archetypes of the heavenly rulers and by astral projection. The tract of the *Corpus Hermeticum* that Hanegraaff is referencing is "Mind to Hermes" (11.19), in which a particularly potent passage extolling the powers of the imagination reads:

And, thus, think from thyself, and bid thy soul go unto any land; and there more quickly than thy bidding will it be. And bid it journey oceanwards; and there, again, immediately 'twill be, not as if passing on from place to place, but as if being there.

And bid it also mount to heaven; and it will need no wings, nor will aught hinder it, nor fire of sun, nor æther, nor vortex-swirl, nor bodies of the other stars; but, cutting through them all, it will soar up to the last Body [of them all]. And shouldst thou will to break through this as well, and contemplate what is beyond—if there be aught beyond the Cosmos; it is permitted thee.⁴

"Mind to Hermes" continues, stating that "unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like." Thus through the imagination is gnosis attained.

ASTROLOGY: THE OPERATION OF THE STARS

Celestial astronomy is the source and guide of the inferior astronomy.

—JOHN DEE

Hermetic astrology is closely related to traditional Hellenistic astrology practiced in Greece and Rome, beginning as early as the third century BCE, which emerged primarily from ancient Babylonia, and to a lesser degree Egypt. The Babylonian astrologers, called "Chaldæi," had names for the planets visible to the naked eye, and came up with the 30° division for the signs. The Chaldæi named these divisions according to constellations they had identified, and tracked eclipses, conjunctions, oppositions, and exaltations of the planets. Originally, from as early as 1000 BCE, the astrologers recognized eighteen constellations, which consolidated to match the twelve signs, some being combined in pairs and others assigned individually. The Babylonians identified five planets: "Mercury (called 'Jumping'), Venus, Mars, Jupiter (called 'the Ferry') and Saturn (called 'Constant')." Divination and astral magic were practiced early in Mesopotamian history, but it was only around the fifth century BCE that the Babylonians began applying astrological techniques to cast individual horoscopes. 6 This early system of astrological divination was integrated into the fusion of religious and philosophical ideas occurring between the Babylonian, Greek, Egyptian, Persian, and Jewish peoples during the Hellenistic era.

While Hellenistic astrology developed out of the Mesopotamian tradition, it was essentially a different form of astrology. Hellenistic astrology tends to focus on the influence that the planets exert upon individual human destinies, whereas the Babylonians originally relied upon celestial events as clues for the intentions of the gods, to predict future events of the world and to control the calendar. The omen-based astrology of the Mesopotamians was not a simplistic set of correlations between celestial and terrestrial events, but rather a way of interpreting the significance of signals sent by the gods specifically to the Mesopotamian kings. These heavenly signals were read and interpreted like a celestial script, revealing the pleasure or displeasure of the gods, to which the king could respond accordingly. As a form of divination, astrology in Mesopotamia and beyond would correlate with what Cicero called

"artificial divination," as opposed to "natural divination." The difference being that natural divination derives from external inspiration, such as dreams and oracles, whereas artificial divination relies on observations and calculations to determine the will of the gods (*de Divinatione* 1.11, 2.26).⁹

Yet there were many corresponding features in both Hellenistic and Babylonian astrology, including the concept of exaltation, which was known by the Greek word *hypsoma* and correlated with the Babylonian *bīt niṣirti* or *ašar niṣirti*, "safe/secret place." A planet's exaltation within a specific zodiacal sign—its hypsoma—was considered an auspicious placement. Apparently, however, the houses of Hellenistic astrology, called *oikoi*, derive from a different tradition though the idea is similar. Directly descended from the Mesopotamian tradition was the concept of triangles (trines), as well as the *dodekatemoria* ("twelfth part"), the "micro-zodiac" created when each sign is further divided by twelve equal parts of $2\frac{1}{2}$ °. Another corresponding detail is the assignation of benefic and malefic qualities to the planets. Like in Hellenistic astrology, the Babylonians considered the benefic planets to be Jupiter and Venus, the malefics Saturn and Mars, Mercury either malefic or ambivalent, and the Moon benefic when not eclipsed. 13

The doctrine of *melothesia*, in which the cosmos is mapped onto the microcosm of the human form, may also have been practiced by the Babylonians and influenced Hellenistic astrology. 14 On this subject is the work attributed to Hermes Trismegistus known as the *Iatromathematica of Hermes Trismegistus to the Egyptian Ammon*, from the sixteenth-century Latin translation. Iatromathematics, a branch of astrology said to have been invented by Hermes, deals with the relationship between the human body and the cosmos, specifically how the planets cause certain physical symptoms, and how to treat them. 15

Egypt had its own astrological tradition developing during this time, which would come to converge with the Mesopotamian tradition around the middle of the first millennium BCE. We learn from the Christian theologian and philosopher Clement of Alexandria of the "Books of Hermes," of which there are forty-two that were "absolutely indispensable" to the priesthood of Hermes. Describing a ritual procession of the Egyptians, he outlines how these books were delineated and the various grades of priests involved. Four of these books pertain to astrology, dealing

with the fixed stars, solar and lunar conjunctions and variations, and heliacal risings of the stars, while others deal with the constitutions of the Sun and Moon and of the five planets.

Their knowledge of the zodiac was depicted in the famous "Zodiac of Dendera," a circular motif of the heavens from the Temple Roof at Dendera (see figure 4.1). However, Budge asserts that the Egyptians derived their knowledge of the zodiac from the Greeks, who transmitted it to Egypt in the Ptolemaic period. The Greeks learned it from the Babylonians, who wove together theology and astrology in their creation myths. The Egyptians recognized many constellations, which they associated with various gods, paying particular attention to the Great Bear, Orion, and the binary star Sirius. Sirius was associated with the goddess Hathor from an early period, and later with Isis, while Orion, which resides near her, was thought of as Osiris. The heliacal rising of Sirius was closely correlated with the inundation of the Nile, a point that we will return to later.

We encounter astrology scattered throughout the philosophical Hermetic literature, for example in the Perfect Sermon, or the Asclepius (19.3) where we learn of the "Thirty-six,' who have the name of Horoscopes," 19 meaning the Decans, which are also discussed in the Stobæus (9.1) "Of [the Decans and the Stars." Here Hermes explains to his son, Tat, how the universe may be conceived as an all-encompassing sphere, beneath which the thirty-six Decans are arranged, between the "Circle of the Universe" and the Circle of the Animals, or the zodiac. The Decans hold the zodiac in place and thus define it, sharing in the motion of the seven planetary spheres. He calls the Decans "Watchers," watching over the seven and ordering all things. Hermes explains that the Decans hold the greatest sway over the affairs of humanity, through the mediation of the seven spheres, which are subordinate to the Decans. In particular Hermes describes the effects of the Decans in the "downfalls of kingdoms, states' rebellions, plagues [and] famines, tidal waves [and] quakings of the earth." Hermes goes on to explain the esoteric nature of meteors and comets, or "longhaired" stars that act as messengers of things to be, or prophets. In speaking of the twelve signs of the zodiac, Hermes says through knowledge of these one may come to know what God is.

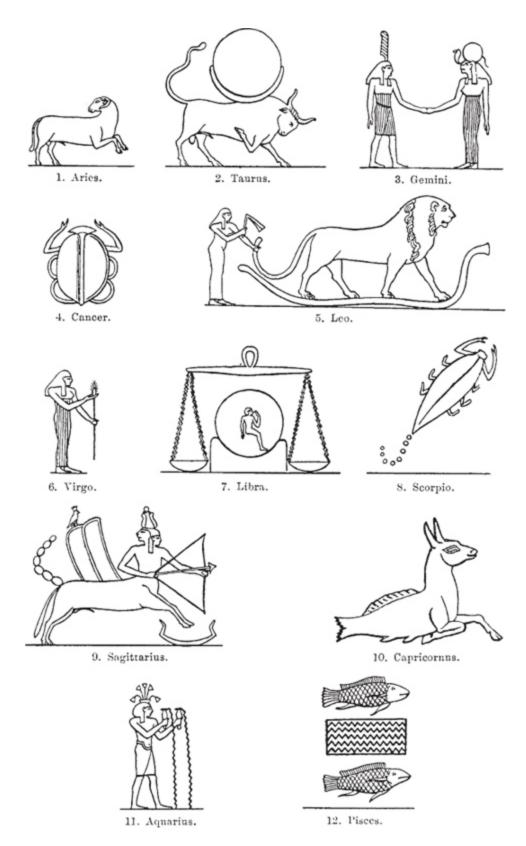


Fig. 4.1. The Egyptian signs of the zodiac. From E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians: Studies in Egyptian*

Mythology, 1904.

Another Iatromathematical text, *The Sacred Book of Hermes to Asclepius*, describes the body parts associated with each of the zodiac signs (animals) in the following manner: Aries is the head of the cosmos; Libra, the buttocks; Taurus is the neck; Scorpio, the genitals; Gemini, the shoulders; Sagittarius, the thighs; Cancer, the chest; Capricorn, the knees; Leo, the back, heart, and ribs; Aquarius, the legs; Virgo, the belly; Pisces, the feet. It further describes the thirty-six Decans, each having its own secret name, image, and associated body part or organ. The image is to be engraved on a specific kind of stone as a talisman, placed under a specific plant, and carried on your person to heal afflictions related to that particular Decan. The text also advises against eating certain foods according to the Decans ²¹

Going back to the *Asclepius* (2.2), we learn that the "Seven' who are called spheres, have essence-chiefs, that is, [have each] their proper rulers, whom they call [all together] Fortune and *Heimarmenē*, whereby all things are changed by nature's law; perpetual stability being varied with incessant motion."²² These seven have both good and bad effects upon the lives of humans and animals upon the earth, depending upon their placement in the sphere of the fixed stars, the zodiac, and Decans.

In one of the Hermetic texts, *The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon*, the planets have ministers, called daimons, that act as rulers of fate and exist on par with Hindu or Buddhist agents of karma that act through the Wheel of Genesis. In this text the Sun is described as a channel or a ray of God, the higher form of mind, or the Demiurge, whereas the planets —the "Wanderers" along with the sphere of the fixed stars (the "Nonwandering Ones") and the sphere of the Earth—are eight spheres that rule through the actions of the daimons (*CH* 16.17). The daimons are of varying influence, either beneficent and malevolent, or both:

To all of these has been allotted the authority o'er things upon the Earth; and it is they who bring about the multifold confusion of the turmoil on the Earth for states and nations generally, and for each individual separately.

For they do shape our souls like to themselves, and set them moving with them, obsessing nerves, and marrow, veins and arteries, the brain itself, down to the very heart. $(CH 16.14)^{25}$

The Sun, which rests like a crown upon the head, has the power to unify the daimons and turn them in a common direction, as a charioteer would do, directing them safely in the order of Divine Will. On this chariot "The reins are Life, and Soul, and Spirit, Deathlessness, and Genesis" (*CH* 16.7), which points to the flow of the life-force being free, Spirit and Soul acting in harmony, with a firm acceptance of deathlessness and the power of deliberate creation within the Self. The text continues to say that the daimons act upon the irrational, lower parts of the Soul, of which there are two: passion and desire. The rational part of the Soul rests above and superior to the daimons and their influence:

Who then doth have a Ray shining upon him through the Sun within his rational part—and these in all are few—on them the daimons do not act; for no one of the daimons or of Gods has any power against one Ray of God.

As for the rest, they are all led and driven, soul and body, by the daimons—loving and hating the activities of these.

The reason (logos) [then], is not the love that is deceived and that deceives.

The daimons, therefore, exercise the whole of this terrene economy, using our bodies as [their] instruments.

And this economy Hermes has called $Heimarmen\bar{e}$.*2 (CH 16.16)²⁷

Compare this to the following passage from the *Anthology* of Hellenistic astrologer Vettius Valens (second century CE):

Each star is the ruler of its own essence for its sympathies and antipathies and mutual feelings in relation to the cosmos, and they have the authority for their commixtures with one another in accordance with application, separation, superiority, containment, spear-bearing, hurling of rays, and approaching of the masters.

The Moon is set down as ruler of foresight, the Sun of light, Kronos of ignorance and necessity, Zeus of opinion and crowns of office and will, the star of Ares of action and troubles, the star of Aphrodite of love and desire and beauty, and the star of Hermes of law and custom and fidelity. Which very stars, [if they are dispensers] of their own effects 28

While both the Hermetic passage and the words of Valens identify the planets with the ruling Fates, the Sun in the Hellenistic philosophy is included within these. In *The Definitions of Asclepius* the Sun stands apart as the rational part of the Soul that has the ability to rein in the daimons, the fates, the Rulers, and direct them according to a higher plan. Valens rejects the idea that fate may be changed, subscribing to a more deterministic model, presenting astrologers as prophets of fate. ²⁹ But whether the goal of astrology is to simply announce what is to come, or to offer the opportunity to change course, is not of great concern in the Hermetic framework. As it is presented in *The Definitions of Asclepius*, it is the rational part of the Soul that offers the opportunity to de-energize the fates and thereby take the reins of our own destiny as Creators.

THEURGY: THE OPERATION OF THE MOON

The secret of this divine operation (or theurgy) is based upon the fact that the soul can be transformed into every likeness. The Great Likeness of God is the Cosmic Order, the making oneself into this Likeness is the supreme transformation or transfiguration of the soul.

—G. R. S. MEAD

Astrology and magic*3 are so closely intertwined that it would be fair to say that astrology and divination are in themselves a kind of magic, as Lynn

Thorndike and others have concluded; however, in contrast to the determinism of astrology, Hermetic magic is intended to liberate the soul from the bounds of fate, leading Yates to call it by the alternative name of "astral magic." The Moon is the most fundamental entry point to the celestial mysteries unfolding above us and has been observed in its cycles and used for divination and magic from early times. As we will explore later, the Moon is the planet of the Mind, in particular the unconscious mind and those mysteries that lie in the depths of the night, illuminated by reflection. Magic is, at its essence, a form of mind control, the magician becoming the master of their own mind to generate desired effects in the material and spiritual worlds. The principles that underlie its effectiveness are rooted in techniques that unify the Body, Mind, and Soul to work in harmony for the betterment of the highest self.

It is natural that magic ought to be assigned to the Moon, for Thoth is a god of both, and it is through magical praxis that one makes contact with the world of unseen causes. As a god of medicine, Thoth employed mesmerism and "magic formulae" to heal. In "The Virgin of the World" (Stob. 25.1.5) Isis relates how Hermes spoke magical words over the holy books to keep them safe from corruption and hidden away. 32 and taught Isis and Osiris all wisdom of the arts, sciences, and laws, who in turn "established on the earth the sacred rites o'er which the mysteries in Heaven preside," ensuring that "magic and philosophy should feed the soul" (Stob. 25.1.37).33 Isis, the "great of magic," like Thoth, is called "Lady of the heart and of the tongue," and thus equated with Logos, the Word, through which creative thought is made manifest. 34 Just as we cannot place a date as to the exact emergence of Thoth, an effort to identify the beginning of magic would be senseless. Magic is not just an intrinsic element of the cosmos; it is, according to the Hermetic doctrines, the very reason that the cosmos exists at all.

Magic refers to the use of specific rituals, invocations, litanies, sacrifices, offerings, and spells to elicit the help of incorporeal entities, be they gods, spirits, intelligences, angels, archangels, daimons, or demons, in order to effect changes within the self and the material world. However as Thorndike points out in *A History of Magic During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, magic was more than simply an operative art, but the word encompassed a particular way of perceiving reality. Thorndike

approaches the history of magic as a history of thought, for it refers to a mental state. The Latin *magi*, "magician, learned magician," comes from the Greek word *magos* that refers to the Persian or Babylonian priests and wise men, and goes back further to the Persian word *magush*, "magician." It is thought that *magush* may derive from the Proto-Indo-European root *magh*, "to be able, have power." The archaic Greek word for magician or "sorcerer," *góēs*, alluded to a psychopomp or "guide of souls." Aaron Cheak asserts that healing and magic were intimately related in Homeric Greece, the word *phármakon*, "medicine, poison," indicates a medicomagical practice, thus foreshadowing the alchemical juxtaposition of medicine and poison, or healing and death. 38

There are two primary types of magical praxis, called theurgy and thaumaturgy. On the one hand, theurgical rites assist the magician's soul in ascending to the planetary spheres of the immortal gods. Iamblichus writes of the Egyptians practicing a sacerdotal ("priestly") theurgy, in which they were "able to ascend to more elevated and universal essences, and to those that are established above Fate, viz. to God and the Demiurgus; neither employing matter, nor assuming any other thing besides, except the observation of a suitable time." On the other hand, thaumaturgy, which derives from the Greek *thaumatourgos*, meaning "wonder-working," invokes the energies of the planets, or the gods, in order to work miracles in the material world. Divine energies and gods are called down from above and brought into the form of a statue or a person. Such are the rites described in the *Asclepius* in the making of gods through the powers of sympathetic magic.

The roots of Hermetic magic are found in the Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, and Jewish magical traditions. Magic was an integral part of the lives of the Egyptians and the Chaldeans and became so for the Greeks with the fusion of these cultures in the Hellenistic period. While much of what they encountered in the Egyptian religion was misunderstood, the Greek travelers to Egypt transmitted its knowledge back to Greece, including its magical practices. According to Budge, the Egyptians employed magic to command their gods for their own benefit and compel them to do their bidding, in contrast with the other civilizations of the ancient East that used magic against dark powers with the aid of benevolent entities. Accordingly the Egyptians made use of both white magic and black magic,

or the "black art," the former being employed for positive effects for the living or the dead, and the latter used with the intent of harming others. $\frac{43}{100}$

White magic in Egypt was primarily used to preserve and protect the body and soul of the deceased in the afterlife, and to join the Spirit-soul to the Spirit-body. This work was assigned to the *Kher-heb*, which we might call the magus, or a man with exceptional occult powers that was officially recognized by the king of Egypt and appointed as the director of ceremonial and religious ceremonies. His duties were extensive and relied on his unparalleled knowledge of the sacred books, his ability to properly intone the magical names, his familiarity with magical spells, prayers, incantations, and his understanding of medicine and the causes of illness. The Kher-heb also had an oracular function, interpreting dreams and foretelling the future, and was said to have the powers of invisibility and exorcism 46

Black magic, on the other hand, was used with the intent to inflict harm, which is a misuse of the art. Magicians made wax figures of their enemies, or the enemies of those who employed them. They cut the person's name into the figure and recited spells to curse the intended individual. Whatever was done to the figure would then affect that individual in their living form.⁴⁷

The Egyptian Book of the Dead is filled with words that relate to magic and spells to be recited, in life and in death. For them, there was essentially no distinction between religion and magic, or for that matter between magic and science, as it tends to be pitted against one or the other in modern dualistic schools of thought. One of the main Egyptian words for magic, heka, is equivalent with Heka, the god of magic and the eldest son of the creator in the Coffin Texts. Sometime after creating Heka, the creator gave the gift of magic, heka, to gods and humanity, to be used for good or evil. Heka is employed through speech, thought, and imagination, and its power is increased through the use of amulets and talismans. The power of the word, which is closely related to the Greek logos, is central to the magicoreligious worldview of the Egyptians. 48 The creator god of the Memphite cosmogony, Ptah, was said to be a great magician and the "Greatest of Craftsmen" who created by spiritual means rather than physical. 49 It was through the heart and tongue of Ptah—his word—that he fashioned the world. 50 Another Egyptian word for magic used in the Book of the Dead is *akhu*, the etymological root of which means both "to be effective" and "to be bright." While akhu and heka are used in the same way, akhu may only be employed by the deceased. 51

As much as the Egyptian magic influenced the Hellenic Greeks, and thus the Hermetic tradition, the magical rites of the Babylonians were also a prevalent source of inspiration and wisdom. The *Chaldaean Oracles* emerged as a product of Alexandrian syncretism as the mythology, oracles, theosophy, and initiatory rites of ancient Chaldaea were philosophized in the same way as had been done with Egypt. Chaldaean is a Greek synonym for Babylonian, a transliteration of the Assyrian Kaldū. The *Oracles* are thought to have been written or redacted by Julian the Theurgist (Ioulianos), also called "theourgos." In one particular Byzantine lexicon he is described as bringing forth a furious thunderstorm through his wisdom to quench the thirst of the Romans. However the original text survives only in fragments in the writings of the later Platonists, as well as in five Byzantine treatises, and in the works of Proclus and Psellus.

The Oracles greatly influenced the Neoplatonists. Beginning with Porphyry, the later Platonists exalted the Oracles, including Iamblichus, Julian the Emperor, Synesius, Syrianus, Proclus, Hierocles, Simplicius, Damascius, and Olympiodorus. 56 Plotinus, on the other hand, paid the Oracles no regard. 57 Crystal Addey explains that the Neoplatonic philosophy emphasizes the unification of the intellectual with the spiritual, for it is only through the purification of the body and soul that one may attain wisdom. 58 In addition to this, the hierarchical universe, the concept of sympatheia, like the Hermetic correspondence, and the devotion to truth, all intrinsic to the Neoplatonic view, supported the use of ritual and religious praxis. 59 Having a spiritual discipline was essential to the philosophical life, and included reverence for the gods, ritual, and oracles. Marinus describes the ritual praxis of Proclus, who made journeys to the sea for purification by salt water, worshipped the Moon and the Great Mother Goddess, and practiced theurgy according to the *Chaldaean Oracles*. 60 Iamblichus's book, On the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians, is a defense (apologia) of theurgic practice in the forms of ritual, divination, and worship of the gods.

Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* provides a record of the *Oracles* and his commentary, preserved in fragments by Christian authorities such as Eusebius and Augustine, among others. He describes his book in his own words as "a record of many doctrines of philosophy, according as the gods declared the truth to be." The *Oracles*, he says, include divination through observation of the stars for the purposes of contemplation and purification. From his extensive quotes and commentary of the *Oracles*, we can ascertain that when properly studied these oracular passages and instructions could be used to facilitate the salvation of the soul, employing the use of magic arts to escape the bonds of fate. 62

The Chaldaean Oracles presents a complicated cosmological system of planes of existence populated by spirits and demons. The highest and most transcendent plane, the First Paternal Intellect, is the abode of a triune Father, Magna Mater (Hecate), and Intellect. The Intellect, or Mind—the Son—comes from the Father, while the Magna Mater, the Mother—the Power, or World Soul, is with the Father. 63 Below this plane exist the Empyrean, Ethereal, and Elemental Worlds. The stars and astrological influences of the signs—agents of fate—were seen to enslave the soul in its physical prison in matter, and must be overcome by theurgic ritual and asceticism so the soul may rise through the worlds unhindered by the various demons found therein. 64 In its descent into form, the lower soul takes on its ochēma ("vehicle") or chiton ("garment"), which is then removed when the higher soul ascends back through the stars and planets. 65 A fragment from the Oracles on the path of return advises the initiate to "Seek out the channel of the Soul-stream—whence and from what order is it that the soul in slavery to body [did descend and] to what order thou again shalt rise, at-one-ing work with holy word."66 The holy word may be understood as a ritual invocation, or as the logos—the "lightgiving word" (CH 1.6) that is the "son of God." This "word of sovereignty" (CH 1.30) is the means of liberation, the atonement $\frac{*4}{}$ synonymous with the magnum opus. It is the realization and identification with the mind of god, as in CH 5.11, wherein Hermes hymns in praise of the father, "you are whatever I am; you are whatever I make; you are whatever I say." This spiritually directed magic instills within the initiate the gnosis of their own creative abilities to live outside the bonds of fate.

What the *Chaldaean Oracles* offered stood in contrast to the cosmic determinism embodied in the Stoic philosophy of the time. According to Hans Dieter Betz, with the predominance of a deterministic worldview in which humans are dependent on universal forces, a place for the magician's role in society appeared. Likewise with their knowledge of the ancient wisdom traditions and skills in communicating with the gods or conducting rituals, writes Betz, the magician served as "a power and communications expert, crisis manager, miracle healer and inflicter of damages, and all-purpose therapist and agent of worried, troubled, and troublesome souls." ⁶⁹

Throughout the Hellenistic period and in the centuries following, there existed a veritable Hermes cult, of which we find clear reference to in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, a collection of magical writings originating in Greco-Roman Egypt. The Gnostic and Hermetic groups of the time were certainly in possession of magical books and were likely to have had copies of the papyri. Hermes is identified most clearly with the logos and invoked for all manner of magical assistance. These syncretic texts, consisting of hymns, liturgies, rituals, mythology, spells, and remedies, are of diverse origin, dating from the early Hellenistic period to late antiquity, or the second century BCE to the fifth century CE.

Yet although the *Greek Magical Papyri* are syncretic, they more aptly represent a new religion entirely, rather than a conglomeration of various religions. Primarily the papyri represent religious ideas of Greek, Jewish, and Egyptian origin, but the focus of these texts is largely on the underworld and its associated gods and goddesses, including in particular Hecate, with whom were associated Artemis, Selene, Persephone, and Ereshkigal (Babylonian). Hermes, Aphrodite, and the Jewish god Iao were included in the pantheon of underworld deities. These deities were invoked for purposes pertaining to a better life in the here and now—more wealth, love, influence, health, and the like—indicating that death and its attendant forces were viewed as the key to attaining success in life. 70

The interest with death and the underworld correlated, incidentally perhaps, with a tendency toward secrecy and the development of an esoteric underworld, particularly of the Hermetic, Gnostic, and Chaldaean schools of thought. Suppression and destruction of magical literature through events like the burning of magical books (such as the book burning at Ephesus described in the Book of Acts) led to the development of an

"underground literature" to preserve the magical knowledge. Further, it wasn't unheard of for philosophers or foreigners to be expelled because their teachings were either subversive or contrary to the interests of the state. Such was the case with the ejection of two Epicurean philosophers from Rome in 155 BCE, for fear that their life of pleasure was corrupting the youth, and the general dislike for the Epicurean philosophers and their expulsion from Messenia. Similarly, the Chaldæi (Babylonian astrologers) were cast out of Rome in 139 BCE for their subversive teachings. 73

Another form of magic practiced during the Hellenistic period was dream magic. The temple of Sarapieion at Memphis, named for the syncretic Greco-Egyptian god Serapis, was known for giving oracular readings, dream interpretations, and "dream incubation." This latter practice involved sleeping in the temple to stimulate dreams in response to specific concerns or questions that the dreamer might have. Records of Egyptian and Greek dreamers have been preserved and much research has gone into their analysis. 74

A complete survey and exploration of Hermetic magic would require a book all to itself and is far beyond the scope of this work that has as its primary focus Hermetic philosophy and alchemy; however let us look briefly at Hermetic magic as it developed in later centuries, and two works in particular that have been of great influence into the modern era. As previously mentioned, magic was closely associated with the name Hermes Trismegistus in the Middle Ages, when the Asclepius and the Picatrix were both well known among medieval scholars. We see Hermetic magic and Qabalism integrated with the angelic magic of Johann Thrithemius, Agrippa, and John Dee of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. English occultists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were greatly influenced by *Picatrix*, including Simon Forman, Elias Ashmole, and William Lilly. 75 Hermetic magic continued to evolve in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the works of Éliphas Lévi, Arthur Edward Waite, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and the Theosophical movement, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and the ceremonial magic of Aleister Crowley and the religion of Thelema.

Originally written in Arabic sometime in the ninth century, and later translated into Spanish and Latin, *Picatrix* is a classic occult text grounded in the Neoplatonic theurgy and the philosophy that All is One, that the

world is composed of a hierarchy of various levels of existence with divine influences descending from above to below, directed by the skilled magician, or sage. An entire passage is dedicated to Hermes in the fourth book, describing how he constructed a magical city with four gates and animal gods placed as images to guard them, which were filled with spiritual essences that spoke through them. 76 Picatrix describes the use of magical images in the making of talismans; the importance of astrological timing to draw the spirits down into matter; how these images are to be drawn and when; and by what names and materials the spirits of the planets are to be invoked, including metals, stones, plants, and suffumigations (incense). At the outset *Picatrix* makes comparisons between magic and alchemy, and differentiates between theoretical and practical magic. The former is defined by knowledge of astrology of the fixed stars, astrological timing, the making of images, and the use of magical words. Practical magic is a matter of virtue obtained by a union of the three natures and the virtue of the fixed stars, and the use of suffumigations and natural heat, or digestion. 77

Heavily influenced by *Picatrix*, Agrippa's survey of Renaissance magic in his *De Occulta Philosophia* (*Three Books of Occult Philosophy*) is based upon a threefold ordering of magic: at the lowest level is natural magic of the elementary world; next celestial magic pertaining to astrology and mathematics; and his third book on ceremonial magic corresponds with the intellectual world that is superior to the rest, serving a religious and theological function. As is typical of Neoplatonic theurgy, the lower worlds receive the virtues of the superior worlds through sympathy and correspondence, or via various intelligences in the elements, plants, stones, metals, animals, angels, and stars. By these same principles, the Magician is capable of ascending through the worlds, even all the way to the first Cause of all things, and to draw the virtues of these higher realms down to the material world.⁷⁸

Magic was not always seen as a beneficial practice among Hermetists, and for some the process of rising through the spheres took primacy over the use of magical rituals to elicit the powers of the gods and spirits of the various worlds. Such was the case for the Egyptian alchemist Zosimos (third–fourth century) of Panopolis, who disparaged magic and stressed the spiritual over the material, attributing this position to Hermes himself:

Hermes, however, in his "About the Inner Door," doth deprecate [this] magic even, declaring that:

The spiritual man, [the man] who knows himself, should not accomplish any thing by means of magic, e'en though he think it a good thing, nor should he force Necessity, but suffer [her to take her course], according to her nature and decree; [he should] progress by seeking only, through the knowledge of himself and God, to gain the Trinity that none can name, and let Fate do whate'er she will to her own clay that is, the body. 79

According to this, it is not through magical manipulations of the material world that we attain liberation and sovereignty, but through surrender to Necessity and Fate, relinquishing control. Yet the gnosis that he espouses is the means to liberation from the bonds of Fate, for without this, people are "mind-less—naught but 'processions' of Fate—in that they have no notion of aught of things incorporal [sic], or even of Fate herself who justly leads them, but they blaspheme her corporal [sic] schoolings, and have no notion of aught else but of her favours."80

Similarly, in another of his writings Zosimos advises the lady Theosebia to be still, for God is everywhere, and will come not through seeking, but through stillness. He tells her to still not only the body, but the passions and the twelve fates:

And [then], without invoking them, perform the sacred rites unto the daimones, not such as offer things to them and soothe and nourish them, but such as turn them from thee and destroy their power, which Mambres taught to Solomon, King of Jerusalem, and all that Solomon himself wrote down from his own wisdom.

And if thou shalt effectively perform these rites, thou shalt obtain the physical conditions of pure birth. And so continue till thou perfect thy soul completely.

And when thou knowest surely that thou art perfected in thyself, then spurn . . . from thee the natural things of matter, and make for harbour in Pæmandres' arms, and having dowsed thyself within His Cup, return again unto thy own [true] race. $\frac{81}{2}$

Note that Zosimos refers Theosebia to two specific treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the "Pœmandres" (*CH* 1) and "The Cup or the Monad" (*CH* 4), treatises that emphasize the possibility of overriding or ascending beyond the fate spheres and relying on a higher spiritual mysticism over the magical rites that seek to appease the gods and gain their favor.

Whether or not to engage in theurgical ritual seems to be less of an either/or question and more of a matter of progression, for magic is a means by which we may develop a relational understanding with the Fates while developing the intuition, the will, and the imagination. Once these faculties are sufficiently developed, the magician becomes so adept in their art that it infuses their every act with creative authority and clear intention. From this a natural, intuitive, and personalized magic develops that has as its foundation a non-dualistic worldview and gnosis of being a cocreator with the Divine.

At the core of such a developed magical praxis is the imagination, particularly as it applies to manifestation. We read in the Corpus Hermeticum (5.1), "Coming to be is nothing but imagination." How things come to be is only a matter of how conscious we are in the use of our imagination, for we are creating therefrom regardless of whether or not we are aware of it. Conscious imagination is developed through the purification of thought, speech, and image, so that each of these powers is brought to their highest perfection. This is where alchemy comes into play, for it is the alchemical art that provides us with the necessary processes by which we may realize the philosopher's stone—the imagination by which we are unified with the Creator. Much of what will follow in this book is common to both theoretical magic and alchemy, and the reader will likely pick up on magical concepts present throughout. As we continue, let us remember that cultivating the imagination in its truest expression is integral to all three Hermetic arts. Just as we employ the imagination in the creative process, it is the power by which we create the substance of our lived experience.

ALCHEMY: THE OPERATION OF THE SUN

It behoveth him who would enter into this art and secret wisdom to repel the vice of arrogancy from him, and to become virtuous and honest and profound in reason, courteous unto men, merry and pleasant of countenance, patient and a concealer of secrets.

—HERMES, ROSARIUM PHILOSOPHORUM

It is to the sovereign, all-seeing Sun that the alchemical branch of the Hermetic tree is assigned, for the Sun is represented in the mineral world by the metal gold, and the ultimate perfection attainable through the alchemical art. The Greeks knew alchemy as *chrysopoeia*, which means "gold making," or "gold composition," from the Greek *khrysos*, "gold," and *poiesis*, "to make" or "to compose." For many people the word *alchemy* conjures up images of mad men in medieval laboratories, or gold-seekers poisoning themselves with mercury in their attempts to transmute lead into gold. In much the same way that magic has been regarded as antithetical to science or as a false religion, alchemy has been considered a naive and primitive precursor to modern-day chemistry, a pseudoscience and a field for charlatans. What is left out of this dualistic conception is the spiritual and transcendental aim of this art, as well as the validity of alchemical transmutation and virtues of the medicines derived from these operations.

While the chemists have generally disregarded alchemical writings as pure gibberish—a word said to have come from the cryptic writing of the Arabic alchemist Geber—it is partly due to the work of C. G. Jung that alchemy has come to be understood as a mystical art that parallels the yogic tradition of India. As such, alchemy may be approached as a spiritual-religious technique for attaining an inner mystical union and reconciliation of opposites, the sacred marriage or *hieros gamos*. According to this view, through projection of the unconscious world of dreams and fantasies into the alchemical retort, the alchemists were engaging in a *participation mystique* that unified consciousness and matter. Alchemical processes of transmuting base metals into gold mirror the internal processes of transmutation that the soul undergoes as it moves toward its own indissoluble perfection and immortality. Within this there are cyclical processes of purification and refinement that work to separate the pure from the impure, which is done in the physical world in the process of making

spagyrics. The word *spagyrica* comes from the Greek *spao*, meaning "to select," or "separate," as it applies to the selection of the pure elements and separation of the impure.⁸⁴ These same processes are internalized in the purification of the soul and the separation of the dross or profane.

Clearly, there is much more to alchemy than conducting chemical operations in a laboratory. The alchemical creed stresses the importance of the alchemist's own purity in conducting their operations, encouraging health, humility, patience, chastity, devotion, study, and prayer or meditation, as well as an overall harmonious relationship to the work itself.85 Alchemical meditation is comparable to Indian yoga and the imagination pertaining to the subtle body, as well as the method developed by Jung called "active imagination," which involves confronting the fantasies of the unconscious through visualization.86 In the case of the alchemists, the inner sphere of the imagination is projected into the alchemical vessel. It becomes evident, however, particularly when studying alchemical engravings and artwork, that the vessel is synonymous with the human body. This concept forms the basis of the work to follow, as we explore the relationship between esoteric anatomy as developed in the Indian and Taoist traditions and the Hermetic doctrine of seven spheres, and the alchemical, magical, and astrological influence of the seven planets and associated metals. But before we embark on that exploration, let us look briefly at the origins of the Western alchemical tradition.

The idea that alchemy simply arose from the desire of gold-seekers to make gold is negated by the long history of knowledge about the assaying of gold going back to the second millennium BCE. Neither does the rich spiritual and mystical symbolism of the Greek alchemical texts support the notion of alchemy arising from the spirit of Greek scientific inquiry. 87 It is far more likely, as Mircea Eliade concludes, that the origins of alchemy, and the fascination with transmutation, originate in the Osirian or Dionysian passion, death, and resurrection, and the concept of an eternal principle within the soul and matter. In his words, "it is the mystical drama of the god—his passion, his death, his resurrection—that is projected on matter in order to transmute it." In concordance with this, Marie-Louise von Franz identifies the Egyptian embalming ritual and Isis mysteries as a quintessential root of Western alchemy that involved a dissolution and

dissection of the corpse, like Osiris, and a subsequent resurrection and regeneration out of the primordial sea. 89

Humans have been engaging with alchemy, arguably, since the Stone Age, when they began making stone tools and found the magic of fire—the element of transmutation. Yet it is generally agreed upon that alchemy's origins can be traced back to the metallurgic skills that had developed in Egypt and Mesopotamia, going back thousands of years. This knowledge met with the natural philosophy of the Greeks, and continued to evolve Hermetic philosophy and theology, and was carried forward by the medieval Hermetic alchemists and the Renaissance. Ohinese alchemy, on the other hand, which was focused on the transmutation of metals into gold as well as the salvation of the soul, can be traced back to the fourth century before our era. There is also a record of Chang Tao-Ling, born in 35 CE, the first Taoist pope who dedicated himself to alchemical study and successfully attained the Elixir of Life, reportedly having received a mystic treatise from the hands of Lao Tzu.

Yet it is the Egyptian origins of alchemy with which we are concerned presently. The word *alchemy* comes from *al-khimia | al-kimiya | alkhemeia*, composed of the Arabic prefix *al*, meaning "the" and *khimia*, from *khemet*, the Egyptian name for Egypt, or "the Black Land." This is why alchemy is sometimes referred to as "the black art" or "the Egyptian art." It was born in the black soils of the fertile Nile River valley that sustained the Egyptian civilization. According to Budge, the word *khemeia* also meant "the preparation of the black ore" and was identified with the Egyptians' chemical knowledge of the metals and their transmutations, in particular with a "black" powder that contained various metals within it. This powder was identified with the body of the underworld Osiris and endowed with magical properties. 93

From an early period the Egyptians were well known for their metalworking skills, using quicksilver in alchemical operations by which gold and silver were separated from the native ore. The Egyptian priests, skilled in the art of metallurgy, mummification, medicine, and ceramics, were essentially using chemistry in their work. These priests were actively involved in studying the forces of nature, which they called "Neteru," touching on one of the fundamental ideas in alchemy that nature can be redeemed by humanity to reach its perfection. For instance, it is

common for alchemists to say that raw metal ores will all eventually become gold naturally if given sufficient time; the alchemist simply accelerates this through their art.

Mircea Eliade identifies three periods of development in the historiography of Greco-Egyptian alchemy, according to historians: (1) technical recipes for alloying, coloring, and imitating gold, such as are found in the Leiden and Stockholm papyri dating to the third century BCE; (2) philosophical alchemy represented by Bolos of Mendes in the second century BCE and his *Physika kai Mystika* ("Of Natural and Mystical Things"), written under the pseudonym of Democritus; and (3) proper alchemical literature beginning with Zosimos of Panopolis in the third-fourth centuries, and subsequent commentaries emerging from the fourth-fifth centuries ⁹⁷

The Leiden and Stockholm papyri, thought to be from a Theban tomb, contain coded words and instructions for replicating silver. 98 In the *Physika* kai Mystika by Pseudo-Democritus, a self-professed disciple of the legendary sage Ostanes, we find alchemical recipes for transmuting base metals into precious metals. 99 While Bolos, or Pseudo-Democritus, wrote in the early Christian era, the father of experimental philosophy, Democritus of Abdera, flourished ca. 420 BCE and was also ascribed with alchemical authority by Seneca, Diogenes Laertius, Synesius, and Syncellus. He was attributed with knowledge of processes for softening ivory, making artificial emerald and colored vitrifications, as well as working with plants, stones, minerals, and metals. 100 During a trip to Memphis Democritus encountered Mary the Prophetess, also known as Maria the Jewess, a renowned early practitioner of alchemy whose wisdom is conveyed in the treatise entitled Sapientisima Maria de Lapide Philosophica Præscripta, Maria Practica, and to whom the alchemical axiom "One becomes two, two becomes three, and out of the third comes the one as the fourth" is attributed. 101 Another famed female alchemist associated with this school and who was said to have conversed with Ostanes was Kleopatra. 102 She was reputed to have successfully produced the philosopher's stone and is also attributed with having created the Chrysopoeia of Kleopatra. 103 This single-leaf document of alchemical symbols is thought to be the key to the opus alchymicum. Democritus was a younger contemporary of Anaxagoras (ca. 500-428 BCE), the Ionian philosopher and a celebrated alchemist. Matter, according to Anaxagoras, could be infinitely broken down into *spermata*, "the seeds of things," a concept to be repeated throughout alchemical texts, such as *The New Chemical Light* by Michael Sendivogius (seventeenth century). 104

A number of alchemical texts emerged in the Christian era, which Eliade attributes to the confluence of Eastern wisdom, astrology, neoPythagoreanism and neo-Orphism, the Mysteries, Gnosticism, and certain "popular" traditions that guarded the secrets of antiquity. 105 However, according to Syncellus and others, around the year 296 CE, many of the ancient Hermetic and alchemical works were destroyed by the emperor Diocletian, who wanted to put a stop to the production of imitation gold by the Egyptian alchemists. 106 Not only was he concerned with how an influx of gold would affect the Roman economy, but he feared that someone might become wealthy enough to form an army against Rome. Many texts were also lost forever in the burning of the Great Library of Alexandria. This was more likely at least three different fires over the course of several centuries rather than one big conflagration, from Julius Caesar's occupation of Alexandria in 48 BCE, when he attempted to set fire to a fleet of Egyptian ships and the fire got out of hand, to Emperor Theosebius in 391 CE and his ambition of wiping out paganism. 107 The final wave of destruction, however, came when the Arabs captured Alexandria in 640 CE. Allegedly the caliph Omar ordered that all Greek books in disagreement with the book of God (the Koran) be destroyed. For a span of six months to come the volumes heated the 4,000 bathhouses of the city. 108

With their settlement in Alexandria, the Arabs encountered the Egyptian and Chaldaean mysteries of astrology, alchemy, and magic, translating and producing Hermetic and alchemical texts that would greatly influence and inform the philosophers and alchemists to come. Jabir ibn Hayyan (ca. 720–800), a famed Arab alchemist of the eighth century whose name was Westernized as Geber, was greatly influenced by the Hermetic tradition. The alchemy that he developed was aligned with Aristotelian notions concerning the four elements and their transmutations, and he proposed that all metals were composed of two principles, sulfur and mercury. The Arabs were particularly inspired by the *Tabula Smaragdina* (the *Emerald Tablet*), which exemplifies a commonality between Hermetic and alchemical wisdom through the principle of macrocosmic and microcosmic correspondence.

Both the exoteric and esoteric aspects of alchemy were recognized in Arabic alchemy, the latter of which were clearly present in the works of Jabir and more so with Muḥammed ibn Umail with his *Ḥall ar-rumūz* ("Explanation of the Symbols"). 110 Arabic alchemists contributed greatly to the art, acting as intermediaries to bring to the West the concept of the *Elixir vitae*, the stone as universal panacea and elixir of immortality. 111 One of the oldest alchemical texts, the *Turba Philosophorum* (the Assembly of the Philosophers), is an Arabic treatise of philosophical and alchemical discourse dated to ca. 900 CE. 112 It is composed of a series of discourses presented by Greek philosophers, serving to integrate alchemy with Greek philosophy.

Zosimos is considered by scholars to be the first Greek author of alchemical texts. 113 Originally from Panopolis and later moving to Alexandria, he was venerated by other authors as "the crown of the sages" and "the universal sage and the shining flame," his alchemical writings circulating in the Arab world. 114 While his work included technical aspects, it was more heavily oriented toward the mystical and the Gnostic-Hermetic worship of the inner God-man, as evidenced in the Mushaf as-suwar (the Book of Pictures). 115 The visions of Zosimos, from *The Treatise of Zosimos* the Divine Concerning the Art, involved a dream encounter with a priest named Ion who submits himself to an "unendurable torment," a ritualistic stabbing with a sword, flaying, dismemberment, and burning in order to transform his physical body into spirit, redolent of the dismemberment of Osiris. 116 In this vision he encounters a bowl-shaped altar of boiling water filled with people "burning and yet alive," which is explained to him as a transformation and "the place of the operation called embalming," where "those who seek to obtain the art enter here, and become spirits by escaping from the body." Multiple alchemical processes are alluded to and various metals are mentioned throughout.

Another well-known Arabic alchemist, Morienus (fifth century), known as the "Old Hermit of Jerusalem," was sought out and found by King Khalid for his alchemical knowledge. He shared in the view of Zosimos that the divine secret of alchemy—the *lapis*—is to be found within the human body, telling Khalid, "You are its prima materia, it is included in you, you keep it hidden in you and it is extracted from you, as it is you who reduce it to its essence and dissolve it, because it cannot be completed without you

and you cannot live without it, and thus the beginning reminds one of the end and vice versa." 118

Alchemy was relatively unknown in medieval Europe until it was introduced by the Muslim world in the twelfth century. Some notable medieval alchemists include Roger Bacon, Arnaud of Villanova, Raymond Lully, Albertus Magnus, George Ripley, Thomas Norton, Johann Isaac Hollandus, and the legendary Nicolas Flamel. Both inner and outer alchemy were in practice in the Middle Ages. On the one hand, operational alchemy was concerned with the transmutation of metals into gold through the preparation of the philosopher's stone, as well as benefiting from the stone's life-extending and healing properties. On the other hand, a spiritual alchemy developed in which a devotional attitude was applied to the laboratory work, which in turn affected the transmutation of the soul. 120

In the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (1550-1650) alchemy experienced a resurgence when the ancient Greco-Egyptian texts were brought back into circulation by Ficino. Eliade writes that "a number of [alchemy's] basic presuppositions—such as the growth of ores, the transmutation of metals, the Elixir and the obligatory secrecy—were carried over from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and the Reformation." 121 Neoplatonic and Hermetic ideals expanded the alchemical milieu, replacing the Aristotelian model. 122 It also took on a medical component, particularly in the work of the preeminent Swiss alchemist and medical theorist, Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541). 123 Paracelsianism, the movement that emerged from the writings of Paracelsus and those influenced by him, with its focus on observations of nature and alchemical, medical, and astrological correspondences, was instrumental in the philosophies of the Renaissance and a proliferation of alchemical literature at the end of the sixteenth century. 124 Paracelsus was well versed in Hermetic philosophy, and his writings helped to bring the focus of alchemy away from the trifling pursuit of gold making to the preparation of healing medicines for the body and soul. 125

One of the most important alchemical texts to emerge during this time was the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (published in Frankfurt, 1550), "The Philosophers' Rose Garden" or "The Rosary of the Philosophers," which concerns the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage). The style of this work greatly influenced the alchemical literature to follow in the late sixteenth and early

seventeenth centuries. 126 It is composed of various sayings of famous writers (Geber, Hermes, Aristotle, Avicenna, Senior, Plato), a series of alchemical illustrations, and a German poem. While the text is a mixture of both physical and mystical alchemy, the illustrations are decidedly spiritual and progress through various stages of the alchemical *opus*, resolving in the *hieros gamos*, or the conjunction of the solar and lunar polarities of the soul.

During the sixteenth century the alchemist Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605) equated the *lapis* with Christ, the "Son of the Macrocosm," a parallel that was later explored in depth by Carl Jung. Alchemy, or chemical philosophy, came to be seen not only as a key for unlocking the secrets of nature, but as a redemptive force for humanity. This Paracelsian notion of redemption through alchemy would be echoed in the works of the alchemist, mathematician, astrologer, and magus John Dee (1527–1608) and the English alchemist Elias Ashmole (1617–1692).

Two streams of spiritual esotericism and alchemical thought to emerge from this time in Protestant Germany were Christian Theosophy and Rosicrucianism. 130 The former was represented by the mystical theology of Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), whose works were rich with alchemical language and imagery and for whom the stone was a metaphor for Christ. 131 Rosicrucian works like the Fama Fraternitatis (1614), Confessio Fraternitatis (1615), and The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz (1616) would further the evolution of spiritual alchemy. Michael Maier (1568–1622), who wrote the well-known alchemical book of emblems, fugues, and discourses known as Atalanta Fugiens, was greatly influenced by Paracelsus and the Rosicrucians. 132 The English Paracelsian Robert Fludd (1574–1637) was a physician, philosopher, and Rosicrucian apologist whose work focused on micro-macrocosmic relationships, Hermetic Qabalah, and astrology. 133 Through his mystical alchemy Fludd expressed how a knowledge of the human body as microcosm could reveal the macrocosmic structures of the universe, and vice versa.

With the Enlightenment came the era of alchemy's disrepute, when scientific writers conceived of the new chemistry as arising from the naivety and obscurity of the alchemical past, an attitude that persists into our modern era. 134 It was only in the beginning of the eighteenth century

that a distinction began to be made between alchemy and chemistry, and alchemy became increasingly viewed as little more than "gold making" and its practitioners as fraudulent charlatans. Yet the alchemical symbolism survived, particularly in its spiritual context, coming to be associated with nineteenth-century occultism and the subjects of natural magic, astrology, and theurgy. 136

A one-sided spiritual alchemy was propounded by Mary Anne Atwood (1817–1910), who was greatly influenced by animal magnetism and Mesmerism, and in the moralistic alchemy of Ethan Allen Hitchcock (1798–1870). Atwood denied the relevance of exoteric laboratory alchemy, writing that "no modern art or chemistry, notwithstanding all its surreptitious claims, has anything in common to do with Alchemy." She emphasized that the secret of the art is hidden in the human being, saying that "Man [is] the proper laboratory of the whole Art," though she granted that physical transmutations such as lead to gold were possible by spiritual means and the proper spiritual attunement of the alchemist. 138

Alchemy would continue to be carried by the spiritual and occult tide in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Éliphas Lévi, Anna Kingsford, Edward Maitland, William Wynn Westcott, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Arthur Edward Waite, and in the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Arthur Edward Waite wrote about alchemy throughout his works on occult subjects like Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Qabalah, tarot, and magic. In contrast to Atwood's purely spiritual—or psychic—interpretation of alchemy, Waite did not discount the chemical aspects of the art. While he accentuated the mystical aims of the *opus alchymicum*, he recognized the validity of a physical philosopher's stone that made transmutations of metals possible. 139

Physical alchemy did not entirely disappear with the rise of the new chemistry, however, and was carried on by certain "secret societies" and the Ancient Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC) of the early 1900s, which taught laboratory alchemy in the tradition of the Rosicrucians. Albert Richard Reidel, or Frater Albertus, carried these teachings on in the Paracelsus Research Society started in 1960. 141

In the twentieth century the works of Carl Jung illuminated the psychological and mystical side of alchemy. While Jung was in accord with

Waite in that he did not discount the reality of operative, or laboratory alchemy, he paid it no mind as it related very little to his psychological interpretation of the art, which had to do with the projection of psychic contents onto matter. Mircea Eliade offered a panpsychic model of the art based on an anthropological approach. More recently, contemporary alchemists like Brian Cotnoir and Robert Allen Bartlett have provided practical guides for operative alchemy that are both physical and spiritual. In fact, Cotnoir says that "alchemy has always consisted of two aspects: the physical and the spiritual. Some early alchemists had a very strong orientation to the chemical aspects of the work, while others later took an almost purely mystical orientation." 144

Alchemy is a scientific and spiritual pursuit aimed at understanding the mechanisms of consciousness and matter. While it can be argued that a true understanding of alchemy is unattainable without the operative component, the average person, who is most likely not inclined to set up their own alchemical laboratory, has much to gain from pursuing a spiritual understanding of the opus alchymicum, by way of the imagination and creative faculty. In the words of Paracelsus, "Alchemy is nothing else but the set purpose, intention, and subtle endeavor to transmute the kinds of metals from one to another. According to this, each person, by his own mental grasp, can choose out for himself a better way and Art, and therein find truth, for the man who follows a thing up more intently does find the truth,"145 and, "when the Philosophers speak of gold and silver, from which they extract their matter, are we to suppose that they refer to the vulgar gold and silver? By no means; vulgar silver and gold are dead, while those of the Philosophers are full of life." 146 It is up to each of us individually to find "a better way and Art" for ourselves, and while it may behoove us in setting out upon this endeavor to seek guidance and the wisdom of certain respectable teachers, ultimately the attainment of the goal begins and ends with the Self.

Frater Albertus described alchemy as "the raising of vibrations," which is a helpful definition for the purposes of this philosophical discourse on alchemy as a means for creative liberation. Everything—from the smallest particles to the universe itself, is vibrating at varying rates, just as each individual is vibrating at their own rate. Alchemy teaches us the operations to transmute energy on the physical, mental, and spiritual planes,

essentially changing and ideally raising vibrations to bring them to perfection. The transmutations of the base metals (lead, tin, iron, copper) into noble metals (silver and gold) guide the alchemist toward the ultimate goal of the *magnum opus* (Great Work). This is accomplished with the philosopher's stone—the *lapis philosophorum*.

It is said by the philosopher Malchamech that "the Stone which is necessary in this work is of a thing having life. You shall find this Stone everywhere, in plains, mountains and in waters, and both the poor and the rich have it. It is most cheap and most dear, it increaseth of flask and blood, and most precious to the man who hath it and knoweth it." 148 The creation of the stone is one of the primary goals of alchemy; however there are various iterations of its qualities found throughout the world's religious and mystical traditions. For example, the *chintamani* in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions is a magical wish-fulfilling stone usually depicted in the hand of the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Ksitigarbha. Also the Book of Revelation refers to the *calculus albus* (white stone) in Revelation 2:17: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it." In Hinduism the vajra is a symbolic weapon that wields the indestructibility of a diamond and the spiritual power of the lightning bolt, a variant of the dorje, from the Tibetan do meaning "stone" and rje meaning "noble, master, or prince," or "master stone." It is indestructible, adamantine, indissoluble, and everlasting, like the philosopher's stone. The *lapis* is variously known as the One Thing and the Elixir, and Paracelsus praises it as "the purest and noblest substance of an indestructible body, which cannot be destroyed nor harmed by the Elements, and is produced by Art." 149

The *lapis philosophorum*, like the chintamani, calculus albus, and vajra, has its own unique magical properties, particularly the power to transmute impure substances into their perfected state, as in the transmutation of base metals into silver or gold, and the apotheosis of the human being within their lifetime. As Philalethes explains, "It is prepared from one substance, with which the art of chemistry is conversant, to which nothing is added, from which nothing is taken away, except that its superfluities are removed." The removal of these superfluities separates what is pure from

what is impure and is conducted by various alchemical operations, such as calcination, distillation, sublimation, digestion, fermentation, separation, dissolution, and coagulation. Once this stone is properly prepared it acts like a panacea for all illness and disease. 151

The transmutation of the soul is conducted in the same manner, by the removal of superfluities and various operations that refine it and bring it to a sublime and subtle power. Those metals with which we are working exist as archetypes found within the psyche and expressed through the energy body. Due to the heavy corruption that our life experiences may have imparted to our metals, it is necessary for us to have a guide in this work. Hermes, Thoth, and Mercury are all considered psychopomps, meaning they guide souls to the realm of the underworld or death. Psychologically, they facilitate communication between the conscious and the unconscious. As such, Hermes and Hermetic philosophy offer a means to heal trauma by reconnecting the conscious mind (above) with the unconscious mind (below), to establish a harmony between them. It is through this harmonization that we reach creative unity, waking up as a single, self-created being seeking to know itself through projection and reflection.



Fig. 4.2. "The Stone that is Mercury, is cast upon the Earth, exalted on Mountains, resides in the Air, and is nourished in the Waters." From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

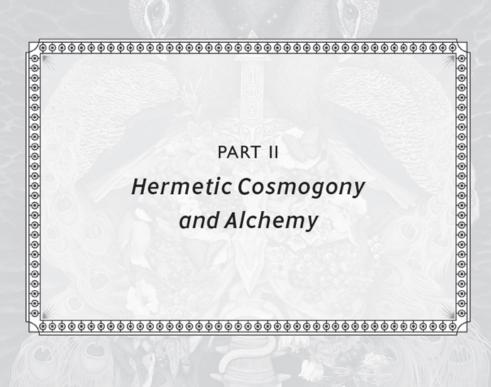
Reconciliation of the opposites is at the heart of the alchemical process as well as the creative process. As Eliade states, "The Stone makes possible the identification of opposites. It purifies and 'perfects' the metals." The initial creative impulse of the one splits and becomes the polarities in the two, and immediately the third principle emerges as the neutral pole or the field in which the polarities dance. Through the reconciliation, or sacred

marriage, of the opposites, the initial unity is recovered. Within the tri-unity that forms heaven we exist in our ultimate divinity, becoming ourselves like gods. However, once we've had the transcendent experience that lifts us from the unconscious waters, we must also return to earth to integrate our higher divine consciousness with the body. While the trinity represents heaven, earth is found in the quaternity and systems of four—the seasons, the four directions, the four elements (fire, water, earth, and air), the square, and all things material.

Alchemy has been called "the Royal Art" because it is at its core a creative process that leads to the perfection, or masterpiece, of human consciousness. The stages of the alchemical *opus* mirror the stages of the creative process, with increasing levels of refinement and subtlety as the work progresses toward its completion. Both the alchemist and the artist are profoundly transformed through the interplay of consciousness and matter, as hidden and transcendent realities are revealed through the work. By employing the processes of alchemy in our creative process, we embark on a journey toward gnosis.

Agriculture, pottery, metallurgy, and architecture are all ways in which humans have transmuted matter into new forms altogether from the earliest times. In these ways and many others we have the opportunity to engage with matter from a holistic, alchemical perspective that brings consciousness into everything that we do and create. Anyone interested in liberating their full creative potential has much to gain by embarking on the alchemical path. On one level, it is the transmutation of the "heavy metals" that lie within the psyche into the pure light of divine consciousness, or gold. On another, we are externalizing our consciousness and its transmutation through physical matter in the form of a poem, painting, book, song, house, garden, meal, business, or anything that we create in the physical realm. In either case, the alchemical principles of creation apply, and yet the "art" will be unique to each individual. The key is to have a physical domain in which to observe the transmutations taking place, for the essence of alchemy is the relationship between consciousness and matter, which can be observed in limitless manifestations and experienced by every individual, regardless of whether or not laboratory work is involved.

Alchemy is something to be experienced, an initiation, on par with a shamanic or Dionysian death, dismemberment, and reintegration. There are four primary phases of transmutation that can be applied to the creative process, beginning with a phase of death and putrefaction and progressing through various phases of purification and refinement. The alchemists observed these phases as a progression of color changes occurring with the transmutation of physical matter (usually plants, minerals, and metals) within their alembics, retorts, and crucibles. The phases progress in order from a blackening stage (*nigredo*), then becoming white (*albedo*), yellow (*citrinitas*), and finally red (*rubedo*). Throughout this work we will touch on these four phases; however the *magnum opus* will be explored in more depth in my next book. For now we turn our attention to an overview of the Hermetic cosmogony and alchemical philosophy and theory.



All things are one, and most of all the bodies which the mind alone perceives. Our life is owing to [God's] Energy and Power and Æon. His Mind is Good, so is His Soul as well. And this being so, intelligible things know naught of separation. So, then, Mind, being Ruler of all things, and being Soul of God, can do whate'er it wills.

—CORPUS HERMETICUM (12.8)

Heaven and Earth

And God-the-Mind, being male and female both, as Light and Life subsisting, brought forth another Mind to give things form, who, God as he was of Fire and Spirit, formed Seven Rulers who enclose the cosmos that the sense perceives. Men call their ruling Fate.

—Corpus Hermeticum (1.9), from Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes

THE UNION BETWEEN HUMANITY AND GOD is a core doctrine throughout Hermetic writings, as are the various levels or spheres and concomitant beings that exist as intermediaries between them. Divine Essence permeates all things great and small. Yet despite the inherent goodness of the world, for it exists as an emanation of the One, it is necessarily a diminution of the Source energy. Humanity is described in its fall into matter and forgetfulness, and given instruction on the reascension to its former state in unity. Thus there is an emphasis on ascending through various spheres of planetary and cosmic influence to return to the Divine Source. However, the initiate must learn how to live within the world, embodied, yet still awake to the immortal and divine Self, and at the time of death, to maintain this awareness of one's eternal and infinite truth. In addition to soteriological emphasis, there is an implied responsibility on the part of the initiate to appreciate and care for the material world, for the body and the earth are infused with heaven, and God is where heaven is. Humanity, standing at the crossroads of the Above and Below, is both earthly and divine and has the power to use their divine connection to restore, regenerate, and care for the Earth.

The first tractate in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, "Pæmandres, The Shepherd of Men," is an essential text in understanding the overall schema

of the Hermetic worldview and its account of Genesis. It opens with a mystical vision, experienced by Hermes, and a subsequent dialogue with a divine entity that calls himself "Man-Shepherd." This direct experience of the Divine is an intrinsic element of Hermetic initiation. Further, Hermes receives the vision while in a state of sensory suspension, or hypnagogia, that mental state characterized as being somewhere between waking and sleeping, during which lucidity of thought and mental imaging is heightened and hallucinations may be experienced:

It chanced once on a time my mind was meditating on the things that are, my thought was raised to a great height, the senses of my body being held back just as men are who are weighed down with sleep after a fill of food, or from fatigue of body. $(CH\ 1.1)^{1}$

The author encounters a being "in size beyond all bounds," who identifies himself as "Man-Shepherd, Mind of all masterhood," who says to him: "I know what thou desirest and I'm with thee everywhere" (*CH* 1.2).² Man-Shepherd is Nous, the Divine Mind or Divine Intellect. When asked what he would know and learn, the disciple implores for gnosis: "I long to learn the things that are, and comprehend their nature, and know God." Man-Shepherd tells him to keep all that he longs to know in his mind, and in this way, all will be revealed. A great vision ensues in which "all things were opened" unto him in limitless light, which was then overcome by darkness. From the darkness, a Moist Nature emerged, roiling with smoke and fire; and then—a "Voice of Fire," which Mead describes as a longing for union with the Cosmic Word.³ From the Light that preceded the darkness, came "a Holy Word," the "Light-Word" (logos), which is "God, Mind" (*CH* 1.5–6).⁴

The union of these two—Fire, which is like unto Desire, and Light (logos), give birth from the Moist Nature to the three elemental principles: Fire, Air, and Earth/Water, the latter of which stay "mingled." Hermes is instructed that his mind is the logos, the Mind of God and is given a vision of the cosmic ordering. Here we learn that nature is the image of God's word. Put another way, God's word, which is the Mind, molds matter (nature) according to its image, or imagination. Thus we see that Hermes is

being given the secret wisdom of creation, which is an act of parthenogenesis.

God is both male and female, which are equated with Light and Life. To give things form, God created a second Mind—Nous—who in turn created the seven rulers that determine Fate. These seven correspond with the seven planets that also exist as male and female both. Nature, we are told, is reasonless, as are animals. Humans alone were given reason and the ability to create through the imagination. This power is truly realized in the eighth sphere, which transcends the limitations of the seven planetary rulers. So while we are advised that Fate rules the human being, there is a possibility for transcendence above the influence of the fate spheres. When the imagination is used consciously, in union with God the Mind in the eighth sphere, then one becomes master of the seven rulers and no longer ruled by Fate, but creating reality in alignment with Divine Will, from within the "formative," or creative, sphere. To know the true Self is gnosis, and this gives birth to the essential human, who abides in deathlessness.

The Hermetic cosmogony provides the groundwork for alchemical theory as it has developed over the centuries. Thus we will see how the concepts of polarity, the trinity, the four elements, the seven spheres and those above, and the twelve signs of the zodiac form a complete system from which to understand the relationship between consciousness and matter.

MICROCOSM/MACROCOSM

That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of one.

—HERMES

Whatsoever exists in the celestial realm likewise exists within the realm of human experience, and vice versa. We acknowledge on a scientific and rational level that we are made up of stardust and that everything we know has its source in the stars, but the implications of this run much deeper, revealing to us how it is we may come to know our true essence. Returning

to the *Tabula Smaragdina* and the principle of correspondence, or "that which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above," we recognize that the macrocosm and microcosm are reflections of each other. The above refers to the Creator or God, to heaven and the celestial realm; the eternal, infinite, and inner dimensions. In contrast the below refers to Creation, matter, to humanity and to Earth; to everything finite, physical, manifest; and that which exists outside and external to the self. Thus we may also say "As within, So without," or "As without, So within." Not only are we a reflection of the cosmos in finite form, but the cosmos is a reflection of us.

The correspondence of macrocosm-microcosm was integral to the philosophies of Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus; to the Neoplatonic and Stoic schools of philosophy; and it is a foundational element of Hermetic teachings. Within the microcosm of the human being are all of the gods, planets, stars, elements, animals, minerals, and plants. In the same way that the human body is animated by the soul, the world itself is regarded as a living being with its own consciousness, what is called the "world soul," or *Anima Mundi* (see figure 5.1). This divine consciousness holds within it the multitudes of finite consciousnesses of individuals and other living things, existing as an intermediary between the eternal and temporal realms. Hence in the figure she is depicted as linked to both God and the animal-bodied humanity, who takes the form of an ape, suggestive of the ape of the mind that has yet to progress through the spheres in its journey to self-realization.

One aspect of the micro-macrocosm correspondence is the sympathy between the patterns, movements, and structures of human anatomy—both physical and esoteric—and the greater cosmos. We are made up of atoms with spinning electrons that mirror the movements of moons around planets, or planets around stars. The celestial bodies of our solar system not only influence humanity through their cosmic motions, but they exist within the subtle body and rule over various organs and physiological structures and systems, affecting our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. The four elements—Earth, Water, Fire, and Air—are present in the body as energetic patterns that govern physiology.

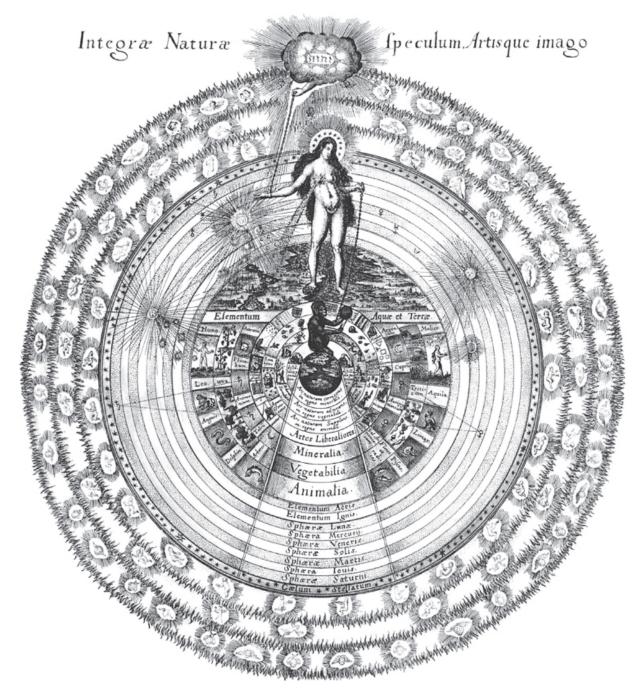


Fig. 5.1. *Anima Mundi:* The Soul of the World in the form of a goddess wearing a crown of twelve stars. Around her unfolds the ordering of the cosmos. From Robert Fludd, 1617.

To study the universe and nature is to learn about the human being, and vice versa. There is poetry to the way the microcosm and macrocosm mirror each other, by which the use of analogy helps us to gain deep insights about

our reality and ourselves. While there are clear differences between cosmic and terrestrial systems, where we find similitudes we find clues to understanding our place in the cosmos.

PRIMA MATERIA

In the deep there was boundless darkness and water and fine intelligent spirit, all existing by divine power in chaos.

—HERMES, FROM COPENHAVER, HERMETICA

The first principle, according to the Egyptians in the theogonies of Damascius, was a *thrice unknown darkness*, beyond intellectual comprehension. This ambiguous darkness gives birth to creation in and from itself. It is called Chaos and known by the alchemists as the *prima materia*, the first matter from which the work begins.

Both the Egyptian and the Sumerian cosmogonies, and many others, begin with a primordial darkness, conceptualized as a fathomless sea. In one version of the Egyptian cosmogony, creation was preceded by Nun, a primordial, motionless, and surfaceless ocean; compared to both the floodwaters of the Nile and to a cosmic egg. Another widely accepted version said that the universe began when a primordial hill arose from Nun, and the Heliopolitan priests were the first to claim that their temple was built upon this hill. The primordial mound, according to the Heliopolitan cosmogony, was equated with Atum, the god of Heliopolis, or else created by him as he emerged from the wastewaters of Nun. When Atum later became solarized as Ra-Atum, he was depicted as a phoenix (bennu) and represented the light that dispersed the chaos. 8

According to the Heliopolitan cosmogony, Atum was the creator deity whose name means "He Who Is Entirety," "The Completed One," and "The Undifferentiated One." Atum was self-created and existed as an undifferentiated unity, the universe before creation when "there were not yet two things." From himself, by masturbation, Atum birthed the first male-female pair Shu (Air) and Tefnut (Moisture), and polarity was born

from unity. Shu and Tefnut together had two children, Geb (Earth) and Nut (Sky), who then coupled and brought forth Osiris, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys. Thus the Ennead of Heliopolis, a company of nine gods, was formed from these initial nine deities. In the original disordered state of nonexistence there was no life and death. It was characterized by weariness, inertness, and negation; with two principal aspects, *keku*, total darkness, and *nun*, the primordial waters. While creation came forth from Atum's act, Chaos and nonexistence continued to remain in the universe in counterbalance to manifest Creation, surrounding it and infiltrating it with disorder. 10

The Sumerians correspondingly conceived of the origins of the universe as beginning with a primeval sea from which emerged a cosmic mountain, within which Heaven (An) and Earth (Ki) existed in a unified state. An and Ki, male and female respectively, brought forth the air-god Enlil from their union. Finally, Heaven and Earth were separated by Enlil into the "great above" and the "great below," establishing the universe, which they called *an-ki*, or "heaven-earth." 11

Hermetic conceptions of creation's beginnings follow closely the Egyptian cosmology, with parallels in the Gnostic tradition, though Mead asserts there is likely an even more ancient source than the Egyptian. 12 In The Sacred Sermon of Hermes it is written that "In the deep there was boundless darkness and water and fine intelligent spirit, all existing by divine power in chaos." To the Egyptian darkness, water, and chaos was added the intelligent spirit, which, like Æther, is that field within which everything exists and from which is derived the intelligence of the lifeforce. From this boundless darkness a holy light emerged, and the elements solidified out of a moist essence. This moistness is the Mother, the first matter, fluid and fertile. As the chaos was divided up, the elements separated, the lighter ones rising above and the heavier ones sinking down, and all was suspended in Spirit. This separation of things unto the Above and Below is reminiscent of the *Tabula Smaragdina*, in which it is said "It ascends from the earth to the heaven and becomes ruler over that which is above and that which is below."14

Sanchuniathon (ca. thirteenth century BCE), a Phoenician writer and sage, describes a very similar cosmogony from Phoenicia, attributed as originating from the Egyptian Thoth. This begins with a boundless dark windy air and Chaos. The wind "fell in love with his own principles, and a

mixture was made, that mixture was call'd *Desire*, or *Cupid*," which was the beginning of creation. He continues to say that "with that wind, was begotten $M\hat{o}t$, which some call Mud, others the putrefaction of a watery mixture. And of this came all the seed of this building, and the generation of the universe." 15

Mot, the Great Mother, like the Greek Rhea, is the first matter of which Creation is shaped. The word *mother* is itself related to the Latin *materia*, which means a "substance from which something is made," and is thought to derive from the Latin *mater*, or "origin, source, mother." So our *prima materia* is in fact our "first mother," the substance from which we ourselves are made, an undefined mass of potential, or what the Greeks call *hyle*. Paracelsus named it *Iliaster*—or "nothing," and also "the Rude Stone . . . that confused mass which is known but universally despised." It is formless, boundless, and eternally existent. Creation arises from this mass of confusion and potential through *Kosmos*, Greek for "order" or "beauty." The embrace of Spirit brings order, and from the body of Mot, matter and all celestial bodies are born. Chaos and Spirit, both existing within the one undifferentiated dark mist, are not two but one; male and female are conceptualized as coexisting in one body capable of parthenogenesis.

While the chaos preceded the separation of the elements, in no way was it left behind. Chaos exists as a necessary aspect of creation, which Paracelsus explains as a subtle, binding force that sustains the globe and the elements therein, "as the chicken is sustained in the egg by its albumen without touching the shell." The chaos of the *prima materia* was present in the beginning and it is to be found within us now. While it is the source of Creation, psychologically it is encountered as a disordering and reduction of the ego to that ineffable "thrice unknown darkness," occurring at junctures of the human experience when we find ourselves to be undifferentiated, confused, or in a state of "weariness, inertness, and negation," as the Egyptians conceptualized it—or, what we tend to think of as melancholia and depression. It's a state of contraction, pulling inward on the self like a black hole. Just as the *prima materia* is the dark abyss before creation, it is an integral part of the creative process. The First Matter is the starting material for the alchemical opus, the creation of the lapis philosophorum, the philosopher's stone, and it is to be found within, accessible to everyone. This sentiment is echoed throughout alchemical

writings. According to the Old Hermit of Jerusalem, Morienus, it is inseparable from the self, "there for both rich and poor, for the generous and the greedy, for him who runs and him who sits. It is cast in the streets and trampled in the dung." Like the primordial chaos, this first matter contains all of the elements in an undifferentiated state of pure potential. As Martin Rulandus the Elder writes, "the First Matter is in the Soul, and the extracting of it is to bring the dormant power of the pure, living, breathing spirit and eternal soul into act." Left untouched, it remains formless, but the embrace of Spirit, which is to say Mind, brings it to life.

Brian Cotnoir, in his book *The Weiser Concise Guide to Alchemy*, points out the difference between the use of the terms *prima materia* and *materia prima* in alchemical writings, the latter being employed when referring to the actual substance used in the beginning of laboratory alchemy, and the *prima materia* "is that state to which all can be reduced." In the pursuit of gnosis, a reduction of the conditioned personality must occur in order for the first matter of the self to be revealed. Thus from a place of pure potentiality, rather than fixed ideas, we begin the work of realizing who and what we are.

There is a notion in alchemical writing that the *prima materia* is to be found in the caves and mines; it is the "mother lode" that is sought. The word *mother* can also mean "a thick substance concreting in liquors; the lees or scum concreted" possibly relate to *modder*, "filth, dregs" (Middle Dutch). 23 *Matter* can also be used in the sense of "what concerns (someone), the cause of the difficulty," 24 and indeed, the undifferentiated chaos that precedes the work is of utmost concern to the neophyte, who seeks to reconcile the disharmony within. To find the *prima materia* is to come face to face with the unknown origins of the self, with the *sopor aeternitatis* ("eternal unconscious"), 25 to get to the heart of the matter that reveals the true nature of reality. It is a terrifying confrontation that may decimate the ego of the alchemist, hence one of its names is the Shadow of the Sun, 26 for it is that part of us that is usually hidden from consciousness.

The *prima materia* is experienced as a regression into undifferentiated consciousness, typified by feelings of confusion, dissociation, melancholy, fear, hallucinations, and fragmentation. For this reason it is often compared to the intoxicating or poisonous effects of alchemical experimentation, called by the names "Venom, Poison, Chamber, because it kills and destroys

the King, and there is no stronger poison in the world,"²⁷ and thus there are many warnings alluding to these dangers. It is on a psychological level equivalent to the Deluge, a flooding of the conscious experience by the hitherto unknown unconscious contents, in which the water is the *Mercurius philosophorum*, the universal solvent.²⁸ Yet despite the psychological dangers inherent in the regression to the primal matter, this spiritual death is a prelude to a spiritual rebirth, and is the foundation of the entire *opus*.

THE MIRACLES OF ONE

The All is Mind. The Universe is Mental.

—THE THREE INITIATES, THE KYBALION

In the Tabula Smaragdina, it is written that "all things were from one," which is reflected in the previous discussion of the prima materia and the chaos that precedes creation. This chaos exists as an undifferentiated unity from which the four elements emerge, but even in their differentiated states, seemingly distinct and separate forms, they are in fact one: "As concerns the Matter, it is one, and contains within itself all that is needed. Out of it the artist prepares whatever he wants." The first principle of Hermetics is that all the things we see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and sense in the material universe are simply different facets of the One Mind, of which all is both a part and the entirety. The universe is energy in all of its manifold expressions, and this energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but is capable of miraculous transformations. Called by many names—the All, the Divine, Source, the Infinite, God, the One, Spirit—it is One infinite, living Mind. From this we understand that everything is first and foremost mental, and subject to the laws of the mental universe. Matter understood in this way becomes the manifest reality of Mind, the structured form of thought. Despite its apparent solidity, matter is a mental picture, and thus the secret to the mastery of matter is the mastery of Mind.

Within the One Mind everything is connected. All manner of psychic and supernatural phenomena, clairvoyance, premonitions, telepathy, out of body experiences, divine inspiration, visions, and the like are all explained

by the mental nature of reality. The mind as conceived of in the modern Western scientific paradigm, as an entity existing separate, unique, and defined somewhere in or around the head of an individual, is a limited and inaccurate understanding of what Mind truly is. That we each have our own unique window from the Infinite Mind is true, shaped and molded by the body of our personal experiences, upbringing, and cultural conditioning. Yet this limiting conception of the individual mind denies us the miraculous powers of the One Thing, which is infinite imagination, creative potential, and the ability to exist in all times and places.

The concept of the One Thing is the principle of unity that underlies all of creation. The teachings of Pythagoras rested upon a foundation of number as a universal and divine principle in which the Monad, or Unity, represents more than the number one, but the principle of number itself. Like many early cosmogonies, the universe was conceptualized as an indivisible unity, undifferentiated, in which everything is contained and from which everything issues forth. "As all things were from one," overything that exists originates from and is part of this One Mind, the manifestation of consciousness, and as a result, everything that can be created is done so by a transformation of this One Thing, which can also be understood as the imagination itself.

POLARITY AND THE STAFF OF HERMES

Opposition unites. From what draws apart results the most beautiful harmony. All things take place by strife.

—HERACLITUS

From the initial unity emerges polarity as the fixed and the volatile, matter and spirit, subject and object, light and dark, male and female, hot and cold, moist and dry, and all opposites. In the human being the polarities are represented by the rational (spiritual) and irrational (physical) parts, or the immortal essence and the mortal body, one desiring to rise above, and the other pulled downward by the passions. As we are taught in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, living piously is to transcend the irrational animal body and

realize the true nature of the immortal spirit, aligning oneself with the Good (*Stob.* 1.5–6).

It would seem that the body and the material world are to be rejected in favor of the spiritual. There are certain passages in the *Hermetica* that express a dualistic attitude that places the good in God alone and evil in the cosmos or in the world below, espousing a hatred of the body and all things corporeal, and declaring that one must choose between the mortal and divine aspects of one's being (*CH* 6.3–4; 9.4; 4.6). However, in the *Asclepius* Hermes teaches of the twofold nature of the human being as a gift that not only makes us superior to the gods—for the gods are only immortal and thus do not partake of two worlds—but so we may both revere the heavenly realms and beings above while also partaking of our earthly natures, tending to the Earth and its creatures as stewards (*Asc.* 8.9.22).

The Hermetic texts present both a positive and a negative view of the body and the world; on the one hand they tend toward unity, and on the other duality. This contradiction is explained by some Hermetic scholars as evidence of opposing philosophies within the Hermetic schools, $\frac{31}{}$ and by others as stages of a process; a positive attitude toward the cosmos and the body provides nourishment and support in earlier phases of initiation, while a negative view supports the work of liberation from the material world and ultimate attainment of gnosis. Bodies are nourished and sustained by matter, while the soul is fed by the spirit (*Asc.* 18). It is quite explicitly stated in *CH* 12.22–23 that God is in all things, for he is All. Which is to say that matter and the body are either not evil, or that evil is also a part of God. Perhaps it is best left to paradox, but from this we can at least agree with Mead that where dualism does appear in the *Hermetica* it serves as a means to understand the nature of the opposites, which are relative and not absolute. $\frac{33}{}$

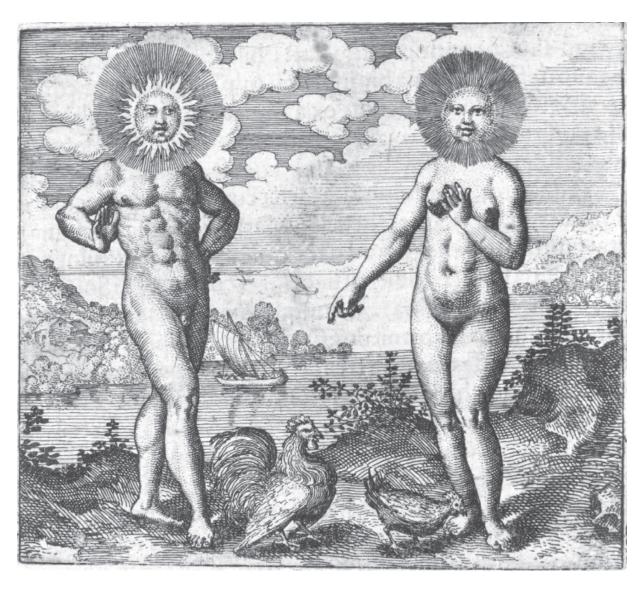


Fig. 5.2. Sol and Luna. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

Alchemically, Sol and Luna, whose alchemical marriage expresses the union of the corporeal with the spiritual, personify the two opposing principles. Likewise, the philosophers stress the importance of both aspects in the production of the philosopher's stone, and thus in the ultimate perfection of the alchemist. As we are told in the *Emerald Tablet*, "Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon." Integrating the solar and lunar qualities brings balance between activity and passivity, and between the conscious and unconscious aspects of our psyche. Through the gift of

consciousness, the shadows are dispelled and the light of truth is integrated within the entirety of one's being, instilling a deep and abiding faith in the immortality of the soul (*Asc.* 18.29). It is the union of these two aspects that gives rise to creation itself, and thus sexuality is a gift to humankind as to all earthly beings to partake in the joys of generation. God is the supreme example of the hermaphroditic union of the male-female, "pregnant with his own will" and taking pleasure in creation (*Asc.* 20).

These two polarities are depicted in the symbol of the caduceus, or the "Staff of Hermes," with two intertwining serpents. In the Indian yogic tradition these polarities are understood as the *ida* (Luna) and *pingala* (Sol) nadis. These two nadis, or channels, are where the subtle pranic energies flow, with *ida* representing the negative polarity and *pingala* the positive. These two currents intertwine around the spinal canal, where the *sushumna nadi* resides, the staff of the caduceus. *Sushumna* is also called *mahaāpatha* (the Great Way) and *madhyamārga* (the Middle Way) because it is the path to liberation. Just as the alchemist seeks to unify the Sun and Moon in the body of the hermaphrodite, the yogin keeps to the Middle Way.



Fig. 5.3. The caduceus or Staff of Hermes with twin serpents of the *ida* and *pingala*. Artwork by Bradley Naragon, 2021.

As the two serpents cross over one another in their spiraling dance, they create the seven chakras, the major vital energy centers of the body. Through the interplay of the opposing forces of male/female, active/passive, and spiritual/physical, these centers are energized. They correspond to the seven planets and the seven metals of alchemy.

The Tetrad and the Trinity



O sons of knowledge, know that the blessed creator most high created the world out of four dissimilar elements, establishing man as most splendid in their midst.

—MORIENUS, BOOK OF MORIENUS

THE FOUR ELEMENTS

In the cosmology of Empedocles (fl. ca. 440 BCE), the spherical cosmos is composed of four primary elements—Fire, Air, Water, and Earth—which are varied in their proportions according to the endless interplay of two cosmic forces. These forces are the polarities of Love and Strife, or attraction and repulsion. In alchemy these are called the "fixed" and the "volatile." On the one hand, Water and Earth represent that which is fixed. On the other hand, that which is volatile corresponds to the active elements Fire and Air.

When the elements solidified out of the dark and watery abyss, first the light elements—Fire and Air—separated and raised upward, while the heavy elements—Earth and Water—stayed intermingled and grounded below (*CH* 1.5, 3.3). The four elements are fundamental energetic qualities that exist in all phenomena in varying proportions. In Aristotle's model of the cosmic order, everything below the Moon, or sublunary, was composed of the four elements and subject to generation and decay. Everything above the Moon was eternal and ungenerated.²

Sometimes the four elements are represented as the philosopher's egg, in which the various layers of the egg are each a different element. The

central yolk is Fire, the shell is the Earth, the albumen is the Water, and Air is found as a thin separating medium between the shell (Earth) and albumen (Water), as well as between the yolk (Fire) and albumen (Water).³

Observing the physical expressions of the elements in the natural world is one way of coming to understand how they function energetically. By simply observing Nature in her patterns of unfolding and continual transformation, we can learn everything we should want to know. Time spent alone in nature is a key part of the great work; observing the everchanging light, reflections on water, the flight of birds, the patterns of clouds, changes of the seasons, the cycles of the Sun and Moon, and the shifting constellations, until these rhythms are no longer seen as separate from the self.

Fire



'Tis Fire alone, in that it is borne upwards, giveth life; that which [is carried] downwards [is] subservient to Fire.

—HERMES TRISMEGISTUS, FROM MEAD,
THRICE GREATEST HERMES

The element of fire is hot and dry; a positive, active, impulsive, passionate, radiant, expansive, volatile, male or *yang* force, both life giving and destructive. It is related to the alchemical principle of Sulfur and represents the fire of the will, the flame of enlightenment, and the light of truth. All reactive substances share in its nature. Fire is that which moves with direction and purpose, relating to vision, intelligence, intuition, and the vitality of the body.

Plato considered fire to be the most mobile of the elements, and the philosophers say it is most rare. Solar fire provides light and warmth for life to exist, and sustains it by its daily rays, but may also be a deadly, scorching power to be duly respected. The Egyptians considered the flame a symbol

of purification with the power to dispel evil, and conceptualized fire in the *uraeus*, the serpent worn on the diadem of the king. It was pictured as a rearing cobra with hood inflated, and related to the fire-spitting eye of the sun god, Re, whose home was called "the isle of fire." 4

The alchemical symbol for Fire is an upward pointing triangle, denoting its natural inclination to rise toward its source, even as its conflagration brings matter down to the earth. Heraclitus (ca. 500 BC) argued that Fire, agent of flux and transformation, is the primary element of the universe: "All things are exchanged for fire, and fire for all things; as wares are exchanged for gold, and gold for wares." It may be a bright conflagration or the concentrated focus of a candle flame. The flames reduce matter to ash; both devastating and regenerative, Fire is the element of change. From the ashes the Phoenix arises, and thus Fire is the element of spiritual rebirth. Hence the words of Heraclitus: "Fire coming upon all things will test them, and lay hold of them."





Air is the first principle of things, for from this all things arise and into this they are all resolved again. As our soul which is air . . . holds us together, so wind and air encompass the whole world.

—ANAXIMENES

The element of Air is hot and wet; it is volatile, fluid, changeable, restless, penetrating, swift, soft, light, male or *yang*, the breath of life. It relates to thoughts, communication, freedom, desires, the wind, and the Spirit (Greek *pneuma*). All gaseous substances share in its nature. It is subtle and diffuse, but not as subtle as Fire on account of its moisture, though both Fire and Air have a rarifying effect. It is intermediate between Fire and Water. It makes both Water and Earth lighter and more diffuse, and it is the life of Fire. It is expansive and receptive, invisible and yet all-pervasive. Even

when still, it is in motion. A gentle breeze may be most pleasant while a forceful gale is quite unsettling, and in its most extreme the raging winds of tornadoes and hurricanes can cause massive destruction.

Anaximenes (ca. 545 BCE) compared Air to the soul and posited that "Air is the one, movable, infinite first principle of all things." Paracelsus compared the Air to the shell of an egg, dividing the within from the without, just as the Air divides heaven and earth. In Egypt the god of air or wind was Shu, who emerged from the spit of the selfcreated god Atum. Shu represented the life principle and his sister-wife was Tefnut, the goddess of moisture. The Greek gods of wind were called *Anemoi*.





The water they have called spirit, and truly, because it is spirit.

—THE GOLDEN TRACT CONCERNING THE STONE OF THE PHILOSOPHERS

Water is cold and wet; it is fluid, mobile, receptive, softening, female or *yin*, passive, changeable, contractive, flowing, adaptable. Along with Air it signifies the alchemical principle of Mercury or Spirit. All liquid substances share in its nature. It relates to dreams, feelings, memories, and the subconscious mind and the collective unconscious. Water fertilizes, regenerates, and sustains life. Its effects can be purifying and redeeming while also being the source of dissolution and putrefaction.

Water takes on the shape of its container and follows gravity down, seeking the lowest places. Through its movement, Water softens and erodes matter. It can be still, reflective, and deep, or shallow and superficial. Water's mutability allows it to exist in solid, liquid, and gaseous forms. Frozen in crystalline form its angles reflect the light and dazzle the eyes. Uplifted in the Air it delights in the shapes of clouds or blocks the light of the Sun, presses against the earth and condenses into rain. Water is found

Above and Below; it may be clear and streaming with light, or dark and turbid. It is the blood of the earth flowing in arterial rivers, branching and moving in eternal cycles from sea, to sky, to mountains, and back to the sea. Without a container it spills and spreads, and in excess it causes great floods. It is volatilized by the wind and the heat of the Sun, uplifted into tempestuous storms and brought crashing against the shorelines. As waterfalls it is most pure, and when suspended by Air and penetrated by Sol the rainbow (Iris) is born.

Thales of Miletus (624–546 BCE) believed that Water was the basic physical substance of the universe. The Egyptians venerated the fructifying Water and Earth before the Sun, which was feared on account of its fiery strength. To the Egyptians the source of fertility was Water, and it was from Water that all things were brought forth. 11





Hermes said that earth is the mother of the elements.

—MORIENUS, BOOK OF MORIENUS

Earth is cold and dry; it is contractive, receptive, stable, slow, female or *yin*, passive, solid, and heavy. The Earth element represents the structured form of thought, the solidification and final materialization of consciousness, corresponding to the alchemical principle of Salt. It is the foundation of everything we are; the matter itself, the solid, dense, physical reality in which we find ourselves. All solid substances share in its nature.

Xenophanes (ca. 570–455 BCE) said "all things come from earth, and all things end by becoming earth." It congeals and consolidates, strengthens and gives weight. Plato called it the least mobile and the most stable. Earth is the planet upon which we stand and it is the body—the vehicle—in which we experience our lives. On account of its density, Earth can be slow to change; however it is also susceptible to massive transformations. Consider the slow change of erosion over time versus the upheaval caused during an

earthquake. The crust of the Earth, like our own skin, is a living organ. It expresses itself through volcanic activity, shifting plates and faults, and trembles in response to inner transformations.

Earth is square as much as it is round, for everything in physical reality can be broken down into quarters—the four directions, the four seasons, the four stages of life, the four quarters of the day, and so on. The human being bears the cross of life, the burden of existing at the crux between spirit and matter and maintaining the balance of the two.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS AND THEIR QUALITIES

ELEMENT	CONSCIOUSNESS	QUALITIES	FACULTY	SHAPE	HUMOR	EXPRESSION
Fire	Superconscious Mind	Hot & Dry	Intuition	Tetrahedron	Choleric	Radiant, warm, expansive, active, light, fast, transformative
Air	Self-Conscious Mind	Wet & Hot	Thinking	Octahedron	Sanguine	Penetrating, diffuse, moveable, fluid, swift, light
Water	Subconscious Mind	Wet & Cold	Feeling	Icosahedron	Phlegmatic	Contracting, adaptable, cool, mutable, absorbing, receptive, flowing
Earth	Physical Body	Dry & Cold	Sensation	Cube	Melancholic	Stable, inert, solid, strong, slow, restful

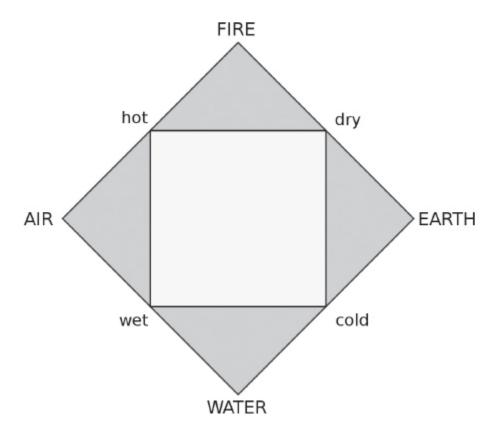


Fig. 6.5. The four elements and their qualities

QUINTESSENCE

This spiritual Essence, or One Thing, was revealed from above to Adam, and was greatly desired by the Holy Fathers, this also Hermes and Aristotle call the Truth without Lies, the most sure of all things certain, the Secret of all Secrets. It is the Last and the Highest Thing to be sought under the Heavens, a wondrous closing and finish of philosophical work, by which are discovered the dews of Heaven and the fastnesses of Earth. What the mouth of man cannot utter is all found in this Spirit.

—Paracelsus, Book of the Revelation of Hermes

The quintessence, from the Latin quinta essentia, is the "fifth element," otherwise known as Æther or space. The other four elements are contained

and animated by Æther. It is the field in which all things move and are moved—seamless, eternal, and limitless. While the elements are of the sublunary sphere, the fifth element belongs to the celestial sphere, the substance breathed by the gods. It is this ætheric element that is the One Mind. So while the four elements each have their distinct qualities, they are united and sustained by Æther. It is compared to both Water and Air, but of a divine and celestial nature, called the Spirit, or Pneuma (Greek).

Rulandus says the *quinta essentia* is the "Mysterium, exalted to the purity of ethereal nature, and the highest virtues." In the sermon *To Asclepius* in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (2.12), Hermes explains that the "space in which the all doth move" is the "Bodiless," "Mind and Reason (Logos), whole out of whole, all self-embracing, free from all body, from all error free, unsensible to body and untouchable, self stayed in self, containing all, preserving those that are, whose rays, to use a likeness, are Good, Truth, Light beyond light, the Archetype of soul." 13

THE THREE PRINCIPLES

Philosophy hath three parts, that is to say, Sol, Luna and Mercury. Of those being joined together, father Hermes knew how to make tincture.

—ROSARIUM PHILOSOPHORUM

When the moist primordial darkness separated, the three elemental principles emerged: Fire, Air, and Earth/Water. For the alchemists, Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt embody these three principles, also called the three "essentials." While the Arabic alchemist Jabir ibn Hayyan (ca. eighth century) proposed that all things were composed of two principal elements, Sulfur and Mercury, 14 Paracelsus (1493–1541) introduced Salt as the third principle of alchemical theory. He taught that these three principles are present in everything that exists, and they are a fundamental aspect of creating alchemical medicines. 15 As Paracelsus describes it, God created the world by reducing it to one body, in which the four elements were developing. This body consisted of three "ingredients"—Mercury, Sulfur, and Salt—of which the four elements are composed, 16 and from which the

seven metals are generated. These three principles are not the crude chemicals found in their physical forms, but their philosophical forms.

CORRESPONDENCES OF THE THREE PRINCIPLES

SULFUR	MERCURY	SALT
全	¥	Θ
Soul	Spirit	Body
Awareness	Mind	Matter
Consciousness	Thought	Form
Sun	Mercury	Moon
God	Godhead	Nature
Creator	Creation	Created
Distillation	Fermentation	Calcination
Essential Oil	Liquor/Solvent	Mineral/Ash

Sulfur

Sulfur (+) is the Soul (Sol), the first principle and consciousness itself. It is the point at which consciousness becomes differentiated from the undifferentiated consciousness of the *prima materia*. While the *prima materia* is the initial source, the Soul is the cause of life, the ordering principle itself, the Will of God, or the true will. This first principle represents the *anima* and *animus* as the male-female pair united in one, or the twin serpents of the *kundalini*. It is active, volatile, and the essence of the Fire element; the divine, masculine spark, the solar light, the intellect, and the intuition. Sulfur is that awareness that never ceases to be. Within bodies Sulfur is the oil, obtained through distillation, which Paracelsus defines as "unctuousness," and that which boils. It is also called the "essence."

Mercury

The second principle is Mercury (\mathbb{Y}), the *Spiritus* or Spirit, which is Mind. It is generated by consciousness and acts as a faculty of consciousness in the generation of form. Mercury is the female and receptive principle to the male-active Sulfur and is sometimes called the "white sulfur."*518 It is the lifeforce, the subtle breath that is ever ebbing and flowing, related to the Air element and thus considered volatile. Its quality is neutral as it forms the field through which expansive and contractive energies flow. As such it is the messenger of the gods, acting as a link between the first principle of Sulfur and the third principle of Salt, being consciousness and matter. Mercury is the mind in all of its aspects, intellectual, instinctual, psychic, conscious, and unconscious. The spirit is the alcohol derived from the process of fermentation, which can be used as a solvent in alchemical operations.

Salt

The third principle is Salt (Θ), the final manifestation of consciousness as generated through the Mind, resulting in the Body (Corpus). Salt relates to Luna; it is passive, fixed, and forms the material world, relating to both Water and Earth. Sulfur as consciousness generates Mercury (Mind) and thus thoughts, and from Mind thoughts take on structured form as matter itself. Salt represents the Body and the instinctual nature; it is synonymous with the subconscious and influenced by it. Salt is the end result of the process of creation. It is the mineral component that is leftover as ash after a substance has been reduced by calcination (intense heat), or the salts left behind after evaporation of a liquid. Both Sulfur and Mercury are to be found in the Body and acting through it.

The Trinity

This fundamental trinity is a universal concept of balance and harmony that is expressed through the Unconscious Body, the Conscious Soul, and the Mind that connects them. Energetically they relate to the negative, positive, and neutral poles, or contraction, expansion, and integration or balance. When the Mind can remain neutral, harmony is achieved between the Body

and the Soul in the *coniunctio oppositorum*, the union of opposites or the balance of the polarities that allows us to transcend the material world and step into our eternal, primordial, indestructible awareness. In figure 6.6 we see the *Corpus* (Body) in the form of a toad at the foot of the *Spiritus* and *Anima*, whose arms are interlocked in a symbol of union. From above the breath of the vital Source energy descends into the alchemical vessel, as the two serpent-dragons of the polarities (*ida* and *pingala*) descend on either side, biting at the ankles of the pair. Drops of pranic energy flow in serpentine streams from the union of the Sun and Moon inside the vessel.

The three principles are not unique to alchemical teachings, but are an example of the Holy Trinity, which is present in many spiritual and religious traditions, including Gnosticism, Christianity, Judaism, and Hinduism. For instance, the three great cosmic forces of Light, Life, and Love in the Vedic teachings relate to Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt, respectively, as the fire of Agni; the *prana* or life-force of Indra; and the love of Soma—the elixir of immortality. These great cosmic forces also translate into the Ayurvedic three *gunas* of *rajas*, *sattvas*, and *tamas*. Rajas is the sulfuric, fiery, expansive, outward motion of positive charge, the yang energy of the Sun. Sattvas is the neutral field through which energy moves, the quality of space and balance, corresponding to Mercury, the mind. Tamas is related to the density of matter, the principle of Salt, the body, and the contractive feminine energy of the Moon. These are the three electromagnetic poles of positive, neutral, and negative present in all things great and small.



Fig. 6.6. The Trinity: Spiritus, Anima, Corpus. From Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, 1652.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

Make of the man and woman a Circle, of that a Quadrangle, of this a Triangle, of the same a Circle and you will have the Stone of the Philosophers.

—MICHAEL MAIER, ATALANTA FUGIENS

The entire alchemical *opus* is explained through a symbol known as the quintessence, or the philosopher's stone. It is the key to the mysteries of consciousness and matter, illustrating the process of creation whereby a person may step into the role of Creator—Soul, Pure Consciousness, or God. As we've already explored the process of creation from the source—*prima materia*—to the separation of the elements, this symbol will provide a synthesis and geometric understanding of how these basic principles of creation relate to each other.

According to Aristotle, the movements of the terrestrial elements are rectilinear, whereas the fifth element has a circular movement. ¹⁹ To move from the square to the circle we must rely on the triangle. While the quaternary refers to the four elements, the points of the triangle refer to the three principles. The square rests within the triangle because the four elements are composed of the three principles, and thus each element is a triad, creating through multiplication (4×3) the twelve signs of the zodiac, or the encompassing circle of the fixed stars.



Fig. 6.7. Symbol of the quintessence demonstrating the outer circle of undifferentiated consciousness from which everything emerges, the square of the four elements, the triangle of the three principles, and the inner circle of unification.

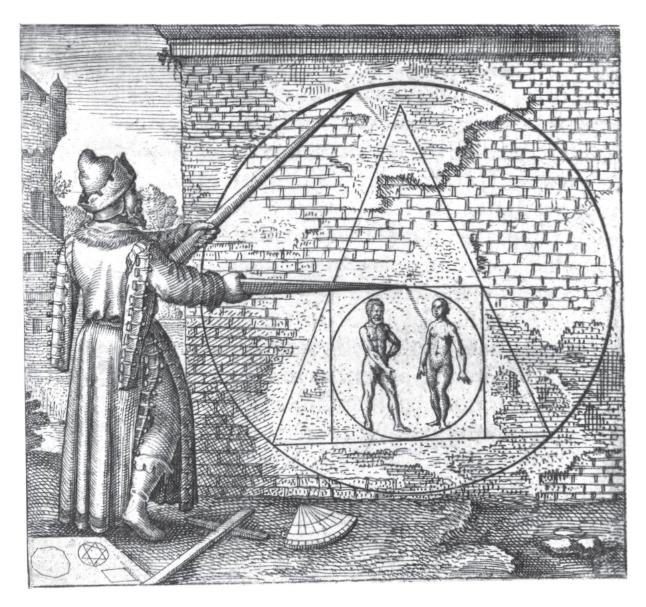


Fig. 6.8. The philosopher demonstrates how the inner and outer are One in the symbol of the philosopher's stone. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

The philosopher's stone is a symbol for the ordering of existence. The outer circle is the unified One (*prima materia*), which is heaven and also the First Matter and Source; the square with its four corners represents the four elements; and the triangle is the trinity of Soul, Spirit, and Body, which form a tri-unity. As it is written in the *Emerald Tablet*, "Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon. The Earth carried it in her belly, and the Wind

nourished it in her belly, as Earth which shall become Fire."²⁰ Here we have the fourfold philosophy of Fire and Water (Sun and Moon, or Knowing and Feeling) uniting as opposites, carried and nourished by Air (Thought) and Earth (Manifestation). The union and balance of the opposites, or the Royal Marriage of Sol and Luna, who rest in the innermost center, is the means by which thought becomes form.

The trinity is described in the *Sacred Sermon of Hermes* as "God, Godhead and Godly Nature." The Soul is the uppermost point where chaos, or the undifferentiated consciousness of the *prima materia*, becomes differentiated consciousness. It precedes Mind, just as God precedes the Godhead. Therefore to say "All is Mind" would be better stated as "All is Consciousness," for Mind is an expression of this primary condition of awareness, which exists regardless of Mind. This is the lower right corner of the triangle. Soul is the actuating cause, and from this differentiated consciousness Mind arises as an expression of the One seeking to know itself—the Mind, or Spirit. Through the function of Mind, form is generated and takes shape as structured thought, or the Body and all that we experience as the material world—the lower left corner of the triangle. Thus we have the Knower (Consciousness), the Knowing (Mind), and the Known (Body).

The square lies within the triangle because the four elements are composed of the three principles (as shown on page 108). The first element is Fire (Intuition), the next is Air (Thought), then Water (Emotion), and finally, Earth (Manifestation). The sides of the square that connect the elements represent the Humors, the defining qualities of the elements, being heat, moistness (or humidity), cold, and dryness. Between Fire and Air is motion, which generates heat. Therefore Fire and Air are both hot. Between Air and Water is time and moistness, and hence both Air and Water are moist. Between Water and Earth is energy and coldness, thus both Water and Earth are by their natures cold. Finally, between Earth and Fire lies space and dryness, both Earth and Fire being by their natures dry. So each element has two qualities: Fire is hot and dry, Air is hot and moist, Water is moist and cold, and Earth is cold and dry. Thus we see that Water is the opposite of Fire for they have no qualities in common. Where Fire may become Air, Fire may not become Water. Fire may act upon Water to remove its moistness and transform it into Air, but Water may never become Fire. In this square of the elements, we observe that Intuition—the essence of Fire—is the opposite of feeling and Emotion—the essence of Water. And likewise Thought (Air) is the opposite of that which is Manifest (Earth).

The Harmony of Fate and the Twelve Torments



And Heaven was seen in seven circles; its Gods were visible in forms of stars with all their signs; while Nature had her members made articulate together with the Gods in her. And [Heaven's] periphery revolved in cyclic course, borne on by Breath of God.

—Corpus Hermeticum (3.2), from Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes

THE HEPTAD

From the tetrad of the four elements and the triad of the three principles we come to the Heptad—seven, a number that bears a wealth of universal and holy significance, symbolizing wholeness, enlightenment, self-realization, and harmony. There are seven vices and seven virtues; seven planets and seven spheres; seven colors in the rainbow and seven notes in the diatonic scale; seven metals; seven chakras and seven major glands; seven days of the week; the seven double letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each having a hard and soft sound as seven polarities; and seven directions—north, south, east, west, above, below, and within.

The number seven was of central importance to the ancient Mesopotamians, who often repeated their magical incantations seven times, invoked seven gods and dispelled seven demons, and conducted seven repetitions of rituals.² The seven-starred constellations of Ursa Major, Ursa

Minor, and the Pleiades were paramount for the ancient astrologers. For the Hindus the stars of the Great Bear, Ursa Major, shone as celestial representations of the seven *Septarishis*, a group of seven Vedic sages, while the Chinese correlated them with the seven orifices of the body. The Mesopotamians revered the Pleiades as the group of gods called "the Seven," and the Hindus saw in them the six visible nurses (and one hidden) of the war god Murugan (Kartikeya).

Seven symbolized completeness to the Egyptians; there are the seven Uraei, the Seven Scorpions of Isis, the Seven Hathors, the Seven-headed Serpent, and the Seven Ārits. The Mithraic mysteries progressed through seven initiatory grades, each of which was protected by a planet: Crow (corax, Mercury), Bride (nymphus, Venus), Soldier (miles, Mars), Lion (leo, Jupiter), Persian (Perses, the Moon), Courier of the Sun (heliodromus, Sun), and Father (pater, Saturn). In the Tibetan Book of the Dead there are forty-nine (7×7) days of the Bardo, the realm traversed by the soul after death. W. Y. Evans-Wentz recounts that in the esoteric Northern Buddhist and Higher Hindu teachings there are seven degrees of $M\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ (illusory nature) in $Sangs\bar{a}ra$ (phenomenal universe), like a chain of seven planetary globes, each with seven rounds of evolution for a total of fortynine "stations of active existence."

After six days of creation the Creator rested on the seventh, having perfected his work. Seven is the number of divinity, eternity, of time and space, and of the quartering of the lunar cycle, thus connecting it with the feminine. It is the number of Athena, the motherless virgin, for seven is a virgin number that was never born, being the only number in the Decad that is not produced from the product of any two numbers, like Athena who sprang forth from the head of Zeus, the Monad.⁹

Also worth mentioning are the seven Hermetic principles of *The Kybalion*, a text written under the pseudonym of the "Three Initiates" and since ascribed to the occultist and New Thought pioneer, William Walker Atkinson (1862–1932). These seven principles are:

- 1. The Principle of Mentalism: "The All is Mind; the Universe is Mental."
- 2. The Principle of Correspondence: "As above, so below; as below, so above."

- 3. The Principle of Vibration: "Nothing rests; everything moves; everything vibrates."
- 4. The Principle of Polarity: "Everything is dual; everything has poles; everything has its pair of opposites; like and unlike are the same; opposites are identical in nature, but different in degree; extremes meet; all truths are but half-truths; all paradoxes may be reconciled."
- 5. The Principle of Rhythm: "Everything flows, out and in; everything has its tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum-swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates."
- 6. The Principle of Cause and Effect: "Every cause has its effect; every effect has its cause; everything happens according to law; chance is but a name for law not recognized; there are many planes of causation, but nothing escapes the law."
- 7. The Principle of Gender: "Gender is in everything; everything has its masculine and feminine principles; gender manifests on all planes."

As these seven principles are so succinctly stated, they need no further commentary and the reader is referred to the original text. However it is worth mentioning the modern popularity of *The Kybalion* and the common conception that it is a foundational Hermetic text. While their relatively recent origin does not discount their value, the influence of the *Emerald Tablet* and other original Hermetic texts is important to keep in mind. However, that being said, developing an understanding of these principles and testing their validity in one's own experience is itself a form of initiation and is highly encouraged.

The extent of mystical and religious significance of the Heptad is so vast that an entire book could be composed on the subject; however the above examples will suffice to form a foundation for our journey through the seven spheres, illustrating the role that the number seven plays in the Hermetic and alchemical work of liberating the soul.

HARMONY: THE SEVEN SPHERES

The Seven Rulers are the Hebdomad, or the Harmony of Fate. In its descent into the body, the soul passes through seven spheres, drinking of forgetfulness and becoming intoxicated by matter. Life and all its complexities and messiness wraps itself around the soul like a cloak, seven layers deep, and these layers we must relinquish and shed in the return ascent through the spheres. Yet experience is the foundation of gnosis, and thus we must experience the spheres before they can be released. This is the Harmony, the spinning of the Wheel, conducted by the Sun and played by the seven planets in the twelve stages of the zodiac. Through gnosis of the things that are—the patterns in the Harmony—we attain gnosis of God.

The Neoplatonist Macrobius (ca. 400 BCE) relates in his description of the soul's descent from the sky to the infernal region of the earth, the soul is overtaken by a forgetful "intoxication" as it takes on the weight of matter. Some have drunk less of forgetfulness—the "river Lethe"—and thus the "memory of the divine order of which they were conscious in the sky" comes back more readily. He explains the search for truth as a process of relearning that which we knew prior to the intoxication of matter.

According to Macrobius, the soul descends from the intersection of the zodiac and galaxy and downward through the seven spheres. This journey enwraps the soul in a "luminous body" like an envelope, and with each successive sphere the soul absorbs various attributes of embodiment. ¹³ What follows is a list of the powers, according to Macrobius, developed in each of the seven spheres, corresponding with the planets:

Saturn: reason and understanding (logistikon and theorikon)

Jupiter: the power to act (*praktikon*)

Mars: a bold spirit (thymikon)

Sun: sense-perception and imagination (*aisthetikon* and *phantastikon*)

Venus: the impulse of passion (epithymetikon)

Mercury: the ability to speak and interpret (*hermeneutikon*)

Moon: the function of molding and increasing bodies $(phytikon)^{14}$

In its descent the soul accumulates matter, which is corruptible, and in this way vice takes root. There is no inherent morality ascribed to these powers, as Mead and others have argued, but insofar as they are the cause of material accumulation, they are the cause of evil, though it is the soul's thought that accounts for how these energies are used—for better or worse. 15

While Macrobius has provided a doctrine of descent, the "Pæmandres" (*CH* 1.25) elucidates the soul's ascent—upon the dissolution of the body, it rushes upward through the Harmony of the Spheres, moving through seven zones and de-energizing each of them along the way. Each of these zones has a specific vice attached to it, and they ascend according to the Chaldaean order of the planets:

Zone 1: Energy of growth and waning (Moon)

Zone 2: Device of evils (Mercury)

Zone 3: Guile of the desires (Venus)

Zone 4: Domineering arrogance (Sun)

Zone 5: Unholy daring and the rashness of audacity (Mars)

Zone 6: Striving for wealth by evil means (Jupiter)

Zone 7: Ensnaring falsehood (Saturn)*6

Once the energizings of the seven are stripped from the soul, it ascends to the eighth sphere of the fixed stars, where "those-that-are hymneth the Father." In this way the soul attains gnosis, entering into and becoming one with God. We see this illustrated in figure 7.1, where the ordering of the spheres is shown in concentric circles. Moving outward in the direction of the four corners are listed a quaternary of correspondences between the seven planets (*Planeta*), seven archangels (*Angeli*), seven body parts (*Membra Microcosmi*), and seven metals (*Metalla*). Along the outermost circle is the sphere of the fixed stars, the twelve signs of the zodiac. This ordering of the planets is repeated in John Dee's "Celestial Egg"; the egg has been employed throughout alchemical texts as a symbol for the elements as much as it has for the cosmos and for the alchemical *opus* (see figure 7.2).

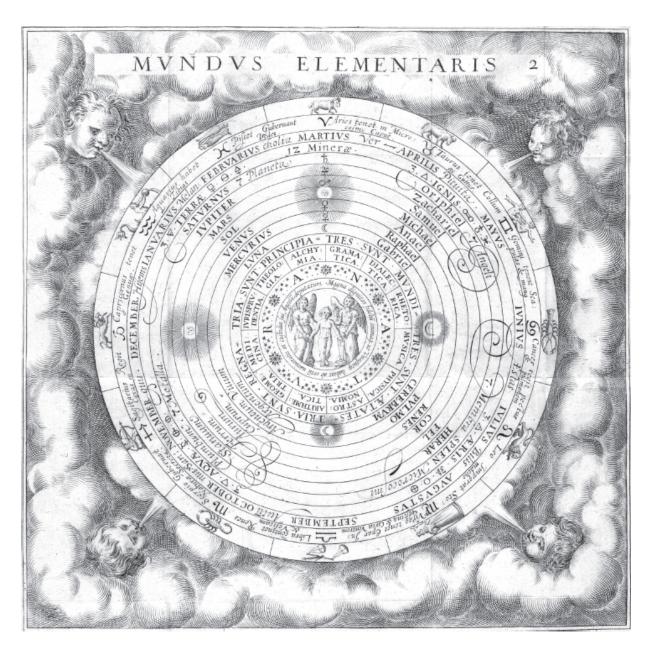


Fig. 7.1. Mundus Elementaris: The elementary world. From Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum et Amplificatum, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

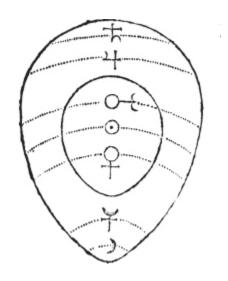


Fig. 7.2. The Celestial Egg. John Dee, *Monas hieroglyphica*, 1564, fol. 17. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress.

VISITA INTERIORA: THE PLANETARY METALS IN THE BODY

And when she saw that Form of beauty which can never satiate, and him who [now] possessed within himself each single energy of [all seven] Rulers as well as God's [own] Form, she smiled with love; for 'twas as though she' d seen the image of Man's fairest form upon her Water, his shadow on her Earth.

—Corpus Hermeticum $(1.14)^{17}$

Central to alchemical theory and practice, each planet has a terrene signature in the mineral world, corresponding to the seven metals: Saturn—lead, Jupiter—tin, Mars—iron, Venus—copper, Mercury—quicksilver, the Moon—silver, the Sun—gold. Within each of these metals the three principles are present as the Soul (*Anima*), Spirit (*Spiritus*), and Body (*Corpus*). The alchemical axiom *Visita Interiora Terra Rectificando Invenies Occultum Lapidem* means "Visit the interior of the earth, rectify, and find the hidden stone." The earth here is to be understood as the body,

for each of the seven planetary rulers have a physical and energetic presence within. Buried in the caverns of the earth, these metals exist in their raw state, and are extracted, purified, and refined by the alchemist. Likewise we have raw accumulations of unconscious material hidden within us that we can bring to the surface to be purified and refined through the creative process.

As Hermes teaches, "all things are full of energies," from the stones and plants, to the animals and humanity (Stob. 8.10, 8.8). Energy is eternal, but it requires bodies in order to manifest its activities. All sensations are of the corporeal body, lasting only as long as the mortal form. However energy is the active force of sensation, such that sensation is the expression of energy (Stob. 8.14). $\frac{19}{2}$

In the esoteric anatomy of the human being the planets and metals correspond with the seven major energy centers, called chakras according to the Vedic tradition. The chakras form at the junctures of subtle energy channels, called nadis. *Chakra* is a Sanskrit word that means "wheel"; however according to the mystic Sadhguru, the chakras are actually triangles, 20 which can be seen as expressing the three principles. While there are said to be a total of 114 chakras, there are only 108 that we have the ability to work with. Sadhguru explains that two of these lie outside the physical body, and four are beyond our ability to directly affect, yet are activated by the work we do upon the remaining 108. The 112 chakras located in the body are grouped into seven dimensions, which is what we understand as the seven primary chakras that lie along the spinal column. 21 Each of these functions in three energetic dimensions—pingala, ida, and sushumna. Essentially, a chakra is an energy center, gate, or seal that exists on the level of the subtle body and communicates with the physical body by means of the nervous and glandular systems. They are sometimes referred to as "transformers," allowing for a two-way transfer of energy, working as points of relationship between the above and below, and between the inner and outer worlds.

Chakras regulate the flow of subtle energy through the body. In the same way that the soul descends through the seven spheres, increasing in density with the accumulation of matter, energy steps down from the Source through the chakras lowering its intensity as it goes. In the process of awakening the chakras, the energy ascends upward, returning to the Source.

This energy, also known as *prana*, *chi*, or the "Breath of God," is within us and in everything we observe in the living cosmos. It is an endless source of energy that we are living and breathing every moment. The chakras are the gateways that this energy moves through, spinning clockwise or counterclockwise, moved by the stream of pranic energies in the same way that a watermill is turned by a flowing river. Clockwise rotation denotes an open chakra and counterclockwise a closed chakra, generally. How open or closed a chakra is determines how freely this energy can move, and subsequently the state of our health and well-being. This depends on one's personal history, tendencies, lifestyle, traumas, and other factors. Ideally, we would have all of our chakras open and fully functioning, so that the life energy is moving freely through us. However, this is not usually the case. When chakras are closed or blocked, energy patterns are disrupted, causing physical, emotional, and spiritual issues. Since the planets correspond to these centers, developing an understanding of their archetypal patterns provides a means of unlocking these chakras.



Fig. 7.3. Seven stages of the Great Work. From Basil Valentine, in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Apud Hermannum a Sande, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

PLANETARY AND ENERGETIC CORRESPONDENCES

PLANET	GLYPH	METAL	WEEKDAY	CHAKRA	COLOR	GLAND	ATTRIBUTE	ELEMENT
Sun	\odot	Gold	Sunday	Crown	Purple	Pineal	Consciousness	-
Moon	(Silver	Monday	Third Eye	Indigo	Pituitary	Perception	-
Mercury	¥	Quick- silver	Wednesday	Throat	Blue	Thyroid	Communication	Æther
Venus	9	Copper	Friday	Heart	Green	Thymus	Compassion	Air
Mars	Õ	Iron	Tuesday	Solar Plexus	Yellow	Pancreas	Will	Fire
Jupiter	21	Tin	Thursday	Sacral	Orange	Ovaries/ Testes	Creation	Water
Saturn	ħ	Lead	Saturday	Root	Red	Adrenal Glands	Survival	Earth

Whether we are talking about zones, spheres, planets, chakras, metals, angels, colors, or musical notes, we are talking about the same thing—seven archetypal energy patterns that exist within the One Mind. The more angles we have to compare it from, the more clearly we come to see the thing in itself. De-energizing of the seven spheres, activation of the chakras, purification and transmutation of the metals—these are all aspects of one thing. Another aspect of this is aligning our creative process with the movements of the planets and the stars, which simultaneously amplifies the energies we are working with and attunes us to the rhythms of the cosmos.

Throughout our experience of life, we confront the seven Rulers as opportunities to reconcile their polarization and bring them to union. As we go about our lives, we have experiences that energize the chakras into states of attraction and repulsion. When we are functioning on autopilot, asleep, and unconscious, it may seem like things are just happening to us. But the truth is we are constantly pinging back and forth between attractive and repulsive states, by desiring or rejecting various aspects of our experience. Hence we are filled with the passions, or vices, of each archetype, and sometimes with the virtues. The correspondences of the seven chakras,

planets, and metals, as well as other magical correspondences, symbolize to the unconscious the type of energy being expressed. We encounter these archetypal energy patterns in an endless variety of ways, for we each have our own unique pathways that we must walk, though their destination is the same.

THE CIRCLE OF THE ANIMALS: OPUS CIRCULATORIUM

Whereas the "Pæmandres" treatise explicates a clear eschatology of the seven zones through which the soul ascends following the body's dissolution, in "The Secret Sermon on the Mountain" (CH 13) Hermes describes to Tat the manner of rebirth, or in other words, the realization of Truth in this life while still embodied. Yet first Hermes informs him that this sort of knowledge cannot be taught, for it is only God that bestows this wisdom as he wishes. He goes on to say that he himself has become an immortal body, "born in mind," colorless and beyond measure, having lost all interest in his initial physical form, and not perceivable by bodily sight. This drives Tat into a state of madness where he can no longer see himself, his mind blocked from the wisdom he so longed to receive. Thus Hermes counsels him on the power that is within him: "Withdraw into thyself, and it will come; will, and it comes to pass; throw out of work the body's senses, and thy Divinity shall come to birth; purge from thyself the brutish torments—things of matter" (CH 13.7).²³ Tat admits his ignorance to the tormentors within him, at which point Hermes teaches him that ignorance itself is the first torment. Hermes then lists the twelve vices, or tormentors, of corporeal life, and the ten powers by which they may be overcome. The following list is adapted from the translations of Mead, Copenhaver, Salaman, and Scott for clarity and simplicity.

THE TWELVE TORMENTORS AND THE TEN POWERS

TORMENTORS (VICES)	THE TEN POWERS (VIRTUES)
Ignorance	Knowledge of God
Grief	Joy

Perseverance		
Justice		
Generosity		
Truth		
The Good		
Life		
Light		



Fig. 7.4. The four cardinal sisters at the round table of the opus circulatorium. Upon the table are the symbols for the four cardinal signs, from left to right: the lamb of Aries, the crab of Cancer, the scales of Libra, and the goat of Capricorn. The zodiacal circle rests above them beginning with Aries. From Johann Daniel Mylius, *Philosophia reformata*, 1622.

This sermon is an initiation from ignorance to truth, and to union with God. The vices are compared to a tent that is passed through, which is composed of the zodiacal circle. Constituted of twelve entities, the zodiacal signs are actually one omniform nature, uniform in action, but expressed in varying ways. Perhaps this is why Hermes does not elucidate exactly how the vices match up with the signs. In any case the zodiac is the "Circle of the Animals, or the Life-giving one" (*Stob.* 9.1),²⁴ and the source of the

animal passions. Just as the zodiac is one omniform nature that expresses itself in manifold forms, the vices are really one, and at the root of all vice is ignorance; likewise with the virtues, of which the root is gnosis (knowledge) of God, the beginning of the path to liberation. When the seventh virtue of Truth is realized within the soul, then the Good, Life, and Light arrive and the torments fly away "in a flapping of wings" (*CH* 13.9).²⁵ The Ten, or the Decad, gives birth to the soul, imparting on it gnosis, for in the Ten is the One that is the unifying Spirit. A number of perfection, the Ten is the Unbegotten. With the twelve tormentors having departed, Tat comes to realize his oneness with all things: "I am in heaven, in earth, in water, in air; I am in living creatures and in plants; I am in the womb, before the womb, after the womb; I am present everywhere" (*CH* 13.11).²⁶ He has transcended the third dimension and now perceives the universe and himself in mind.

THE TWELVE SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

ZODIAC SIGN	SYMBOL	ELEMENT	PLANET	MODALITY	ALCHEMICAL PROCESS
Aries	Ram	Fire	Mars (+)	Cardinal (Spring)	Calcination
Taurus	Bull	Earth	Venus (–)	Fixed	Congelation/ Coagulation
Gemini	Twins	Air	Mercury (+)	Mutable	Fixation
Cancer	Crab	Water	Moon (–)	Cardinal (Summer)	Dissolution
Leo	Lion	Fire	Sun (+)	Fixed	Digestion
Virgo	Virgin	Earth	Mercury (–)	Mutable	Distillation
Libra	Scales	Air	Venus (+)	Cardinal (Fall)	Sublimation
Scorpio	Scorpion	Water	Mars (–)	Fixed	Separation/ Putrefaction
Sagittarius	Archer/ Centaur	Fire	Jupiter (+)	Mutable	Inceration
Capricorn	Goat-fish	Earth	Saturn (–)	Cardinal (Winter)	Fermentation
Aquarius	Water-bearer	Air	Saturn (+)	Fixed	Multiplication
Pisces	Fish	Water	Jupiter (–)	Mutable	Projection

Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury each rule two signs, expressing active (+) and passive (-) qualities. The Sun (+) and Moon (-) rule only one sign each and balance each other.

The four elements and the three principles multiply as the twelve zodiacal signs. The alchemical work is often called the *opus circulatorium*, referring to the cyclical progression of the planets moving through the fixed

sphere of the zodiac. This process begins with the sign of Aries and reaches its culmination in Pisces, a wheel of continual transformation and the means by which the alchemist reaches the goal of the *magnum opus*. Integrating an understanding of the twelve zodiacal signs, their planetary rulers, and elemental correspondences is a key aspect of alchemy. There are also twelve key alchemical processes that have been assigned to the zodiac signs, which we shall touch upon throughout the discourses on the planetary archetypes.

8

Ogdoad The Creative Sphere



Accept my reason's offerings pure, from soul and heart for aye stretched up to Thee, Thou unutterable, unspeakable, Whose Name naught but the Silence can express.

—Corpus Hermeticum (1.31)

THE "DISCOURSE ON THE EIGHTH AND NINTH" (dated to the second century CE) as it has come to be called since the original title was torn off, is the sixth tractate of the Nag Hammadi codex. It consists of a conversation between Hermes, identified often simply as "father," and a son. This discourse is an advanced teaching of Hermes to a disciple that has already transcended the Seven Rulers and is ready to progress through the final initiation of the Eighth and Ninth. To gain access to the higher worlds, one must first shed the garments of the seven planets. The seven planetary governors, the "Ousiarchs" of the Harmony that represents humanity's ruling fate (CH 1.9), must be overcome, or de-energized as it is written in the "Pæmandres" (CH 1.25–26). The de-energizing occurs when the dualistic male-female aspects of each planetary influence are reconciled within the self. The polarization is what energizes them and what binds the soul in archetypal patterns. Only by these reconciliations does the initiate enter the eighth sphere of the Begotten One, "the rational soul of the cosmos" in which souls and angels sing "a hymn in silence" (NHC 57, 26– 61, 17)² to the Mind that dwells in the ninth. As Man-Shepherd explains: "And then, with all the energizings of the Harmony stript from him, clothed in his proper Power, he cometh to that Nature which belongs unto the Eighth, and there with those-that-are hymneth the Father" (CH 1.26).

The importance of the "Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth" in the path of Hermetic initiation, and the process of awakening, cannot be overstated. Within its pages are the teachings worthy only to one who has been elevated to the level of pure thought, that of Thrice-Greatest Hermes, who is embodied by the eighth sphere itself; hence the number eight is given to Hermes in theurgic systems. The epilogue of the text indicates that the dialogue takes place in Egypt, as Hermes instructs the son to record the teachings on turquoise steles, using hieroglyphics. In Hermopolis and Heliopolis, Thoth was worshipped as the head of the Ogdoad, a group of eight deities, considered to be his souls. He was also the "lord of the Ennead;" in this sense, Thoth-Hermes oversaw the eight *as* the ninth. The Ogdoad were called the "Souls of Thoth," a set of four male-female pairs, signifying the four elements; on the right the males were depicted with the heads of frogs, and on the left the females with cat faces. In other contexts the females are serpent-headed. §

The number eight, or the Ogdoad, is represented by the cube that has eight corners. When turned upon its side, eight is the symbol for infinity, the lemniscate denoting a perfect flow between polar opposites, a continuous movement transcending polarization. The shape of the number is related to the twisting serpents of the caduceus, the pathway in the human form to liberation and immortality. In the words of the great occultist Éliphas Lévi, "When realizing God as the infinite man, man says unto himself: I am the finite God." Lévi explains the compulsions of the opposites in terms of the astral light, the Soul of the World, which is imprinted with whatever corruption and vice have been expressed by word and by actions. The astral light forms the æthereal Body, which is like an envelope of impressionable light that surrounds the human being from conception to death, at which point it is liberated. However, at the time of death the æthereal Body "attracts and for a long time preserves, through the sympathy of things homogeneous, the reflections of past life." By the record of our unresolved compulsions, vices, and corruptions, we are magnetically drawn toward that which reflects these energetic charges.⁸ Attractive forces on the left and repellant forces on the right, the female and male principles, interact to produce charged impulses that either draw us

deeper into the density of matter or lift and lighten us by their resolution and the "triumph of justice," by which we are liberated. For the Ogdoad, Manly P. Hall attributes the keywords "love, counsel, prudence, law, and convenience," words associated with the eighth arcanum of the tarot, Justice, the scales of equilibrium.

In the seven spheres exist all of the polarizations that ensnare the soul, in the involutionary patterns that draw it downward into the density of matter. Evolutionary movement, on the other hand, is that which has as its aim and destination the Source, the One, the Monad, and the realization of the Infinite Mind. But like a wheel, this is a continual movement, first down, then up, repeating in cyclical motion like the repeated circulations performed in alchemy, by which the matter becomes increasingly refined. For each of the individual seven spheres, there will be involution and evolution. The seven represent a scale of decreasing subtlety and increasing density as one moves down from the highest to the lowest. Then as the soul ascends it becomes more and more subtle. While the involutionary motion through the Harmony of the seven spheres represents the irrational, contractive, and what might be considered evil qualities expressed in the soul, it is a necessary motion as a means of purification. As Mead comments, "the Harmony is only evil apparently; it is really the Engine of Justice and Necessity to readjust the foolish choice of the soul that is, to purify its irrational desires, or those propensities in it that are not under the sway of right reason and philosophy." 11

In the Tree of Life of Qabalah the seventh sephirah, *Netzach*, is the "Victory" over the seven Rulers that establishes equilibrium between opposing forces, existent on the horizontal plane of the material world, and the eighth sephirah, *Hod* is the "Splendor" attainable from the reconciliation of heaven and earth, the above and below, the macrocosm and microcosm. Hod is the Hermaphrodite, the Magus, or Mercury; it is the link between humanity and the mind of Thoth and all divine masters, existent in the One Mind, that impart their wisdom to us through thought. The seven spheres are reconciled in the eight, or as poetically stated by Aleister Crowley, "There are seven keys to the great gate, being eight in one and one in eight." 12

Yet there is still a separation between the individual, personal identity and the mind of God, which is perceived as an external divinity accessing

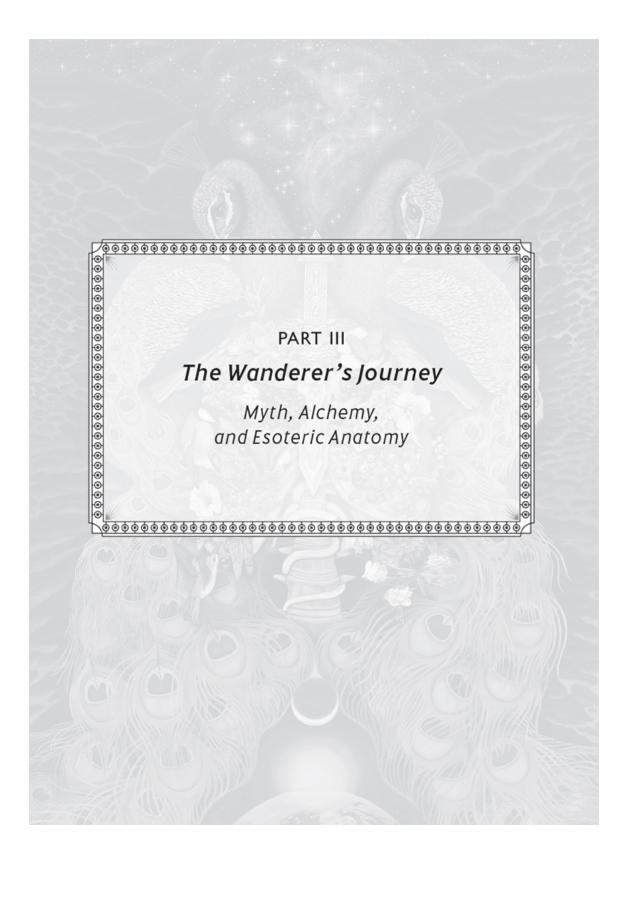
the lesser mind of the initiate. It is not until we reach the ninth sphere that we reach the level of the true "I Am," in which the Divine Mind assumes the identity of the individual, erasing all separation. The path of return is the path of gnosis, but the only way out is through the self-created material world, in effect to prove the "I AM" through personal experience, purification, and transformation. Thus the ninth path is that of the ninth arcanum of the Hermit, the true Hermetic's path, upon which the initiate holds a lamp of their own, attaining to the realization of the Monad that is lived through experience. In the words of Crowley, "this Lamp is not made with hands; it exists alone and for ever; it has no parts, no person; it is before 'I am.'" 13 The Hermit's lamp is the lamp of Trismegistus; from its light we are illuminated within, withdrawn from the world and guided toward the ninth path of initiation and self-realization. Like the ninth sephirah, Yesod ("Foundation"), correspondent with the Moon, the ninth path represents the desire to exist as a pure reflection of the solar light, with all obscurities and impurities removed by the act of sequestration. As Gareth Knight explains in A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism, the ninth path has a purifying effect upon the Emanations, for which reason it is called "Pure Intelligence." 14

The Hermit, having attained to a realization of Divine Mind, is far from retiring to a state of spiritual bliss, for now they must hold up the lamp of Trismegistus and shine its light into every dark corner of the world to dispel falsity. They must "walk the walk," so to speak, and live by the truth of their realization. Yet action submits to faith; in walking the walk the Hermit surrenders to Divine Will, moving simultaneously between heaven and earth, in the momentary and pure desire that issues from the Heart. In the subtle body the Heart is the energetic center that bridges the above and the below, with three chakras above and three below. With the center of the eight crossing over in the heart, the energies of the above and below are in continuous circulation. Having attained to the eighth sphere, the initiate experiences the flow of harmony that exists when all of the seven spheres have been reconciled. Fittingly the Lord of the Ogdoad, Thoth, in his ibisheaded form stands close by upon the weighing of the heart in the Hall of Judgment.

This realm of realization, of perfect, pure, transcendent thought translated into righteous action, is the consciousness of Thrice-Greatest

Hermes. To reach the eighth sphere is to be vibrating on a higher energetic octave within oneself, a state that transcends the seven spheres and envelops them within itself. 15 Thus it transcends the physical realms, for which the seven are representative. As Hermes says, "For never, son, can an embodied soul that has once leaped aloft, so as to get a hold upon the truly Good and True, slip back again into the contrary. For when the soul [once] knows the Author of its Peace, 'tis filled with wondrous love, and with forgetfulness of every ill, and can no more keep from the Good" (Stob. 1.3). 16 The process of spiritual awakening is revealed in the "Pæmandres" as a separation and reconciliation of each of the seven Rulers, thus preparing the soul to enter the "formative" or creative—sphere. The eighth sphere is a realization within the disciple of a truth beyond language, gnosis of the true power of the soul in the creation of the universe. The unawakened mind from pure forgetfulness, unaware of their formative powers, is creating unconsciously, but with gnosis there is nothing left to do but to sing praise in silence. The son, realizing his union with Father Trismegistus, sings praise: "I am the instrument of your spirit, mind is your plectrum, and your guidance makes music with me. I see myself. I have received power from you, for your love has reached us" (NHC 60). 18

Whereas the eighth sphere is a level of pure mind generated by consciousness—the mind of Thoth-Hermes, beyond reincarnation into a realization of immortality—the ninth sphere is the level of the Self-Begotten One, an even higher level of Divine Mind. Beyond these in the tenth lies the Unbegotten One. Through this process the initiate has encountered the trinity that preceded their journey through mortal separation, returning to the One as embodied in the three: the Unbegotten God, the Self-Begotten Mind, and the Begotten son. It is the completion of the ten that unifies the entire process, returning the One to the One and joining with the circle of unbroken consciousness, the ouroboros eating its own tail, the beginning and the end as One.



Nature embraced by Man brought forth a wonder, oh so wonderful. For as he had the nature of the Concord of the Seven, who, as I said to thee, [were made] of Fire and Spirit—Nature delayed not, but immediately brought forth seven "men," in correspondence with the natures of the Seven, male-female and moving in the air.

—PŒMANDRES (*CH* 1.16)

Wandering with the Archetypes



A man is a god in ruins. When men are innocent, life shall be longer, and shall pass into the immortal, as gently as we awake from dreams.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

WITHIN THE MICROCOSM OF THE HUMAN BODY, seven stars illuminate the inner pathway to our truest self. They are the seven inner planets of traditional astrology, the planets visible to the naked eye that have influenced human thought and imagination from time immemorial. The planets are called stars, or the Wanderers because of their movement against the backdrop of the fixed stars, which are the "Non-wandering Ones" (*CH* 16.17). The following discourses will provide a comprehensive exploration of these seven stars, to include the symbolism that can be derived from simple observation, as it was in the beginning, and from mythological significance rooted in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and as seen through various cultural lenses. We will encounter on this journey the qualities of the planets that are invoked or called upon in ritual or ceremonial magic and prayer, as well as the alchemical significance of the planets, both internally and externally, and finally their placement and roles in the esoteric anatomy of the human being.

Through a deep investigation of all of the various angles of a planet's qualities, we can glimpse the overall archetype that it embodies. Because

archetypes, like people, are complex networks of associated ideas, behaviors, characteristics, values, and processes, they must be approached like a person that you wish to know on an intimate level. They cannot be summed up in a word or understood on a surface level. To truly encounter them requires a devotional longing to merge with them in the imagination, and thus to know their experience from within, to empathize with it, to take it on as a role in order to grasp the subtle causes and reasoning behind the archetypal expression.

We must allow the archetypes to penetrate to the soul and truly change us from the inside out, engendering within us a deep connection with the eternal. Through this experiential embracing of each archetype, we come to understand the Self as a whole, and how the players relate to one another in the play of an individual life, which is a holographic version, a unique angle, of the collective drama. Looking deeply enough into the Self, one attains gnosis of the All. Yet the point is not to remain identified with the archetypes, but to integrate them within the psyche and to make the unconscious conscious.

LIVING MYTHS AND MEMORIES

Myths are living stories taking place in the mind of the Creator, discovered anew on an individual level, rather than static stories that took place "once upon a time." They are quintessential to our shared humanity, retaining their potency through the centuries, representing specific psychological processes that are encountered on the path of awakening and remembering who and what we truly are. Some of the stories reflect our divinity and many of them are more accurate representations of our flawed humanity. This brings to mind the words of Heraclitus that "Mortals are immortals, and immortals are mortals, the one living the other's death and dying the other's life." The lines between good and bad, good and evil, right and wrong, god and demon, are not so clearly defined. Sometimes the gods who rule in heaven behave quite malevolently, or out of vain and selfish interest. Sometimes what is evil on the surface is actually a hidden path to redemption. What is good is not always good, and what is evil is not always evil. They are, like all polarities, diametrically opposed only when brought to their extremes, but always do they retain an element of their opposite. Thus what is hot may become cold, what is rigid may become soft, what is evil may become good. With an open mind we perceive the entirety of a spectrum as one, just as each planet is perceived in all of its extremes and polarizations, such that we understand how Mars expresses itself as both feminine (yin) and masculine (yang) energy—creative passion and shrewd discernment, or violent confrontation and assertive action—or Venus expressing the passivity of attractive magnetism versus the active effort to attract people and experiences.

Myths are like memories. We are born forgetful and must rely on the stories of our predecessors to help us remember where we came from, and where we are going. However, it is a truth that can only be learned through direct experience, or gnosis. It will not suffice to simply teach it like a formula. One must approach the subject as if it were a lover, a communion in which layers of the collective human psyche are perceived and experienced on a personal level. By familiarizing ourselves with the vast array of human experiences, collected and preserved in myths, we begin to perceive the complexity of the mind of God, the Creator, the All, Divinity, Consciousness, or whatever name you prefer to call it, and in this way realize the presence and active role of God within.

TRANSCENDING BINARIES IN HELLENISTIC ASTROLOGY

Hellenistic astrology divides the planets between two groups based upon their predominant qualities. A planet may be either benefic or malefic, meaning it has either a predominantly positive or challenging influence. This system of classification is rooted in the astrology practiced by the ancient Mesopotamians. These predominant qualities may be increased or decreased based on their position in a sign or in relationship to other planets. The two benefic planets are Venus and Jupiter, while Mars and Saturn are malefic, and Mercury is neutral but becomes either benefic or malefic by association and placement in a chart. The two luminaries, the Sun and Moon, are also neutral and influenced to be benefic or malefic depending on the circumstances; however Ptolemy groups the Moon together with the benefics.

Another classification in Hellenistic astrology is the doctrine of sect, which is helpful in understanding what roles they play in determining fate.

A planet may be either diurnal and aligned with the Sun, or nocturnal and aligned with the Moon. Each of these sects has a light (luminary), two benefics, two malefics, and a neutral planet. Thus the Sun is the light of the diurnal sect, with the two diurnal benefics Venus and Jupiter, while the Moon is the light of the nocturnal sect, with the two nocturnal malefics, Mars and Saturn. Mercury is neutral and belongs to both sects. The sect also bears an influence on how benefic or malefic a planet is. Jupiter and Saturn, which are diurnal, have a greater influence and are considered the greater of each class, Jupiter being the greater benefic and Saturn the greater malefic. On the other hand, nocturnal Venus and Mars are referred to as the lesser benefic and malefic, respectively.

The classifications of benefic and malefic are best understood as a spectrum. To think of the terms benefic and malefic as good and bad is an oversimplification and has led to a trend in modern astrology of downplaying or ignoring these designations because of the polarizing reactions that they elicit in the modern mind. However, it is important to understand the difference between our subjective reactions to negative and positive experiences and the purpose that they serve in evolution, individually and collectively. Malefic influences provide necessary limitations, friction, death, and change, which have their part in any natural or creative cycle. In agricultural societies, understanding the malefic influence of Saturn was consequential to the timing of planting and harvest, for its malefic aspect was observed to correlate with periods of infertility and decline. Yet there is no moral judgment of this being incontrovertibly bad; it provides contrast and cultivates appreciation for life and periods of expansion and abundance.

Another way in which this polarization expresses itself is through gender, but more specifically sex, as each of the planets has generally been considered to be male, female, or both. However, just as people may experience gender and sexuality on a spectrum that is capable of shifting throughout life, but containing all possibilities regardless, the planets cannot be so simply understood in this binary way. While the Western Esoteric tradition may see the Moon as predominantly feminine—yin, contractive, generative, passive, cold, and moist—many cultures had or continue to have a male conception of the Moon. In fact most of the planets have varying sexual identities depending on different cultural lenses, but also even within

a single tradition there are variations in the way a deity associated with a planet behaves in the myths about them.

DIVISIONS OF THE PLANETS

	DIURNAL	NOCTURNAL	
Luminaries	Sun (+)	Moon (-)	
Benefic	Jupiter (+)	Venus (-)	
Malefic	Saturn (+)	Mars (+)	
Mixed / Neutral	Mercury (Morning Star) (+/-)	Mercury (Evening Star) (+/-) ⁴	

Genders: (+) = masculine, (-) = feminine, (+/-) = neutral or changeable.

Like people, planets are complex and can't be constrained to simple dualistic ideas of good and bad, or male and female, but must be understood as a whole. Working with the planets hermetically is a process of transmutation, internally and externally, with the aim of unifying the opposites that engenders balance and awakens creative capabilities. What is soft is made hard, what is seemingly impenetrable is dissolved, what is solid is made liquid, what is liquid is crystallized. This is the basic idea behind the hermaphrodite in alchemical symbolism, the changing nature of Hermes combined with Aphrodite's libidinal creativity and propensity to union, brought together and unifying the polarities in one body.



Plate 1. Without putrefaction there is no generation.

The Death of the Profane, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2015, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.



Plate 2. Bring the swan and the crocodile to perfect balance in perpetual motion.

Concordia Oppositorum, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2017, oil on panel, 14 x 11 in.



Plate 3. The dissolution and upwelling of the unconscious; a merging of the inner and outer worlds.

The Composition of the Waters, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2016, oil on panel, 30 x 40 in.



Plate 4. The Light Bearer points the wanderers to the waters of renewal and away from the tail of the scorpion.

The Cross Rose in the Garden of Venus, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2016, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 in.

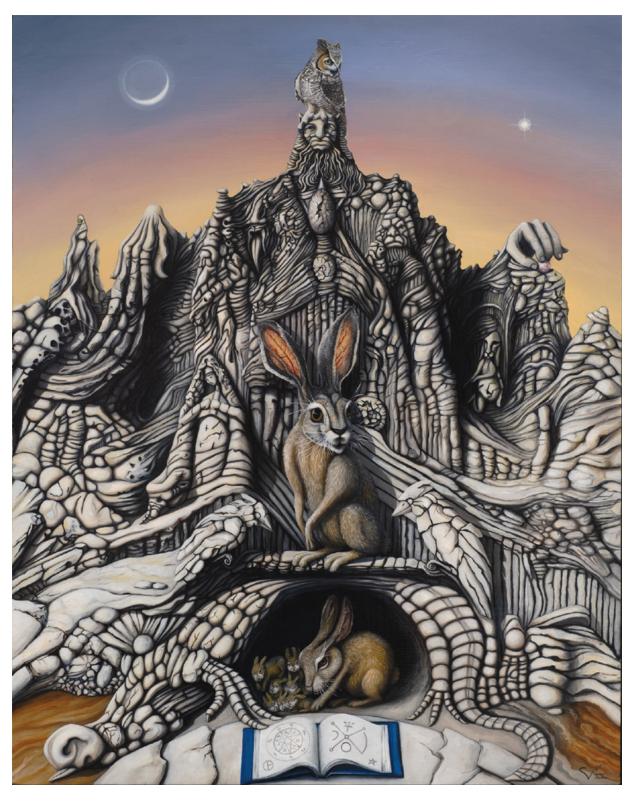


Plate 5. Venus descends into the underworld to be reconciled with her Animus.

The Book of Blue Vitriol, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2020, oil on panel, 17.75 x 22.5 in.

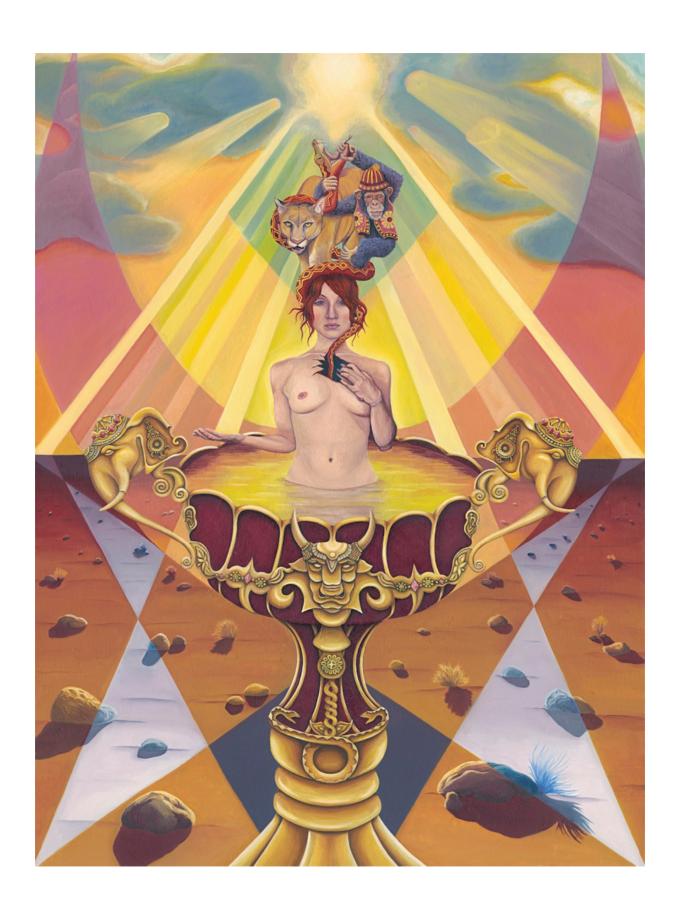


Plate 6. The Anima emerges from the desert chalice as the Spirit ascends from the Corpus.

Emergence, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2014, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in.



Plate 7. The Lord of Utterance and Justice pierces the scales of the crocodile.

The Transfiguration of Thoth (Squaring the Circle), Marlene Seven Bremner, 2018, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 in.

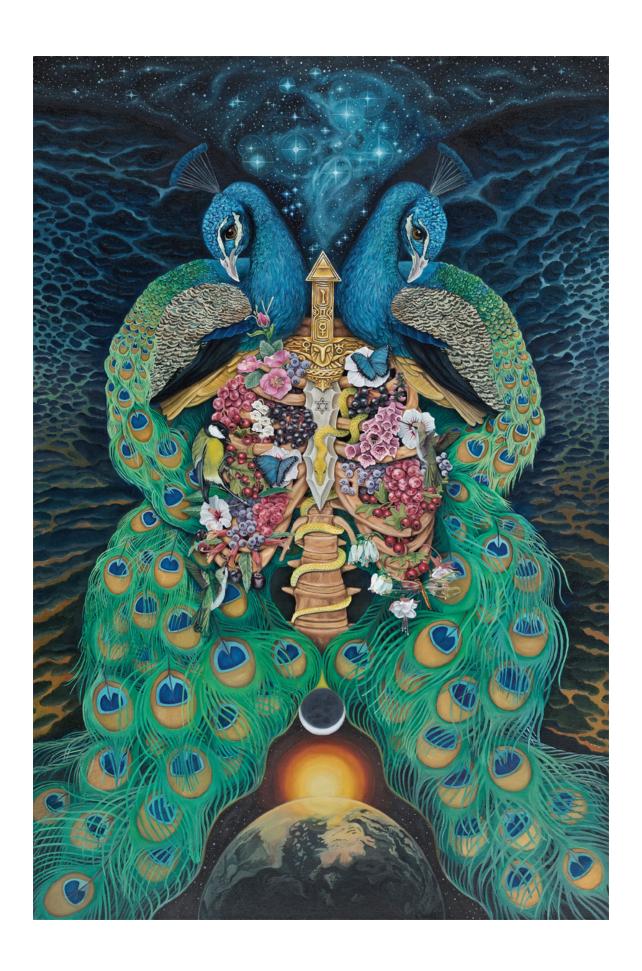


Plate 8. Two peacocks stand at the gates of heaven and earth, their bodies forming a vertical eight whose center is the heart.

From the balance of Above and Below, Divine Beauty unfolds in limitless abundance, and the tails of the peacocks herald the resurrection of the Sun.

The Gates of Paradise, Marlene Seven Bremner, 2015, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in.



Plate 9. The elixir of immortality flows from the fountain at the foot of the oak, where the lion and unicorn are reconciled.

Iovis de Somnio: Coniunctio Solis et Lunae (Jupiter's Dream: Conjunction of the Sun and Moon), Marlene Seven Bremner, 2020, oil on canvas, 56 x 72 in.



Saturn Into the Darkness



No thought is born in me that does not have death carved in it.

-MICHELANGELO

FROM CREATION ITSELF beginning in black chaos, to a baby in the womb, a diamond in the depths of the Earth's crust, or a seed in the soil, the darkness nurtures new life. Hence it is with the blackness of Saturn that we commence our journey through the wandering stars. Saturn's sphere is the first that the soul passes through in its descent to Earth, and according to Macrobius it is here that the soul develops the powers of reason and understanding (*logistikon* and *theorikon*). The farthest planet we can see with the naked eye and second only to Jupiter in size, Saturn is a massive gas giant, yet its distance from Earth causes it to appear diminutive with a faint, yellowish light. It moves slowly through the heavens, taking a lengthy 29.4 years to make a full orbit around the Sun. These qualities were

observed by the ancients and reflected in the many appellations the planet received, such as *Šerru* in Akkadian, meaning "small," "tiny," or "wee," and *Sani* in Sanskrit, from the root *Sanaischara*, meaning "slow mover." It was also observed to exhibit a regularity, and thus was called "Constant" in Babylonian astronomy, 4 or *kajamānu* in Akkadian, meaning "the steady." The Arab name, *zukhal*, is suggested to mean "to crawl" or "to advance very slowly."

Saturn's slow, steady movement was likened by the Mesopotamians to the movement of the Sun, and thus it was called Sun of the Night, or *Stella solis*, "star of the sun," and was sometimes associated with *Šamaš* (Shamash), the Sun god. This relationship was also recognized in India where Saturn is the son of the Sun-god Surya. Like the Sun, Saturn is a unique ball of gas composed mostly of hydrogen and helium, but at its center lies a dense core of iron and nickel. Saturn is also known as the black sun, or *sol niger*, the opposite of solar illumination and life-giving energy. It was called "black" in the Babylonian cuneiform texts, despite its yellow appearance that has been recognized from ancient times. One possible explanation for this is that Saturn appears yellow when high in the sky, and black or gray during its heliacal risings and settings when its light is dimmed by the thicker atmosphere along the horizon. Saturn's association with the Sun would have made these heliacal events more significant to the ancient Babylonian astronomers. 10

As the outermost limit of our ability to see, and with its stunning array of icy rings, Saturn signifies boundaries and limitations, corresponding to the Earth element—the physical realm, and all that is heavy, dense, cold, dry, and slow-moving. Ptolemy related the cool and dry qualities of Saturn to its distance from the Sun's warmth and Earth's moistness. Saturn is called the greater malefic and is masculine and diurnal, with its domicile in both Capricorn (negative, yin, contractive, earth) and Aquarius (positive, yang, expansive, air). In the northern hemisphere these signs fall in the cold and dark months of winter, opposite to the moist and fiery signs of Cancer and Leo. The influence of Saturn upon these signs is differentiated by their elemental natures. As an earth sign, Capricorn expresses Saturnian structure through the material realm, while Aquarius, an air sign, expresses it through the mental faculty and the world of ideas. In both cases, it is the structuring of energies that forms the basis of their relationship to reality.

As an earth symbol, Saturn relates to the bones as the body's structural framework, and the skin as the boundary between within and without, as well as the spine, sacrum, knees, calves, ankles, and the right ear. It rules over the bladder, intestines, colon, and the processes of elimination and urination; and according to Valens, also the tendons, blood serum, phlegm, kidneys, and inner private parts. 12 In nature it holds authority over the heaviest metal, lead, as well as trees and stones. 13 It is the structured Salt of the alchemical opus and thus relates to structures from the atomic and cellular levels to the realm of thought. Saturn represents the beginning of time and the beginning of the alchemical work, the *prima materia*—the raw ore hidden in the caverns of Earth, and the Chaos from which creation was born. Likewise the Mithraic mysteries, according to Celsus, assign Saturn, and the metal lead, to the first gate that must be passed through as one ascends through the seven spheres. 14 In the Vedic esoteric anatomy of the body, Saturn rules the first chakra, Muladhara, "the Root." This chakra correlates with the Earth element and is located at the base of the spine and the perineal region. Here it functions in relationship to the genitals and reproductive organs, and it is the seat of the kundalini energy that, once awakened, rises up the spinal column to the crown. In all of these ways Saturn represents the beginning of a process of spiritual ascension that is rooted in the darkness.

Many cultures have recognized the earthy quality of Saturn, evinced by names such as *T'u-hsing*, "earth-star" (Mandarin); *Dosei*, "earth, soil" (Japanese); and *T'osong*, "earth, soil" (Korean). The Mesopotamians associated Saturn with *Ninurta*, the god of war, hunting, and farming whose name meant "Lord Earth." In the Egyptian pantheon Saturn finds a parallel in Geb, whose body was Earth itself, with powers extending to the growth of all vegetable and animal life upon the surface, and to the underworld beneath, including dominion over tombs and the dead therein. Usua searth represents states of inertia and rest, Saturn is assigned to Saturday (*dies Saturni*, Latin). In Genesis 2:2–3 this is the seventh day on which the Creator rested following six days of Creation. Likewise the Hebrew name for Saturn is *Shabtha'* i or *Shabtay*, Related to *Shabbat* ("Sabbath"), Hebrew for Saturday, the holy day of rest on which no work is to be done (Exodus 20).

Saturn is assigned to the third sephirah in the Qabalistic Tree of Life, Binah, or "Understanding." Binah sits atop the left Pillar of Severity, relating to the left side of the brain and to form, crystallization, receptivity, patience, stillness, and the feminine principle, or yin. Yin is contractive, involutionary, passive, cold, and dark. Likewise, Binah is symbolized by imagery resembling female anatomy, including the darkness of the womb, the vulva, caves and tombs, earth, the Moon, the cup, the chalice, the cauldron, enclosed spaces, boundaries, and water. It is the drive to turn inward and its virtue is silence, which is not only a cessation of speech but a stillness of the entire being, such as one reaches in meditative states. It is the space needed for the truth of the Soul to be heard, and it is Binah that passes the light of *Chokmah* ("Wisdom") to the lower sefiroth. 20 In the words of Hermes (CH 13.2), "[the womb] is the wisdom of understanding in silence, and the seed is the true good."21 The feminine womb is related to the unconscious mind that, like the earth, receives the seed of conscious intent, and thus becomes impregnated and gives birth to new forms in reality.²²

COSMOS, CHAOS, AND RECONCILIATION

The Roman Saturn (from the Latin *Saturnus* or *Sāturni*) is the god of the harvest, arriving when the Sun begins to decline with scythe in hand to reap what has been sown. While Saturn has taken on an evil role in many respects, the Romans had nostalgia for a time preceding Saturn's maleficence when he ruled over the heavens in a Golden Age, when the first race of golden humanity "lived like gods, with carefree heart, remote from toil and misery." Saturn ruled over Italy and reigned as a benevolent king, bestowing upon his subjects good fortune, a civilized life, and knowledge of agriculture and law. The Golden Age of Saturn eventually faded into legend but was commemorated in the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia from which many of our Christmas traditions arise, which coincided with the winter solstice when the Sun enters Capricorn. The festival of Saturnalia was a reversal of Saturnian energy on every level of society, just as the Golden Age of Saturn was a time when Saturn's malefic nature was *in absentia*.

Saturn became syncretized with the Greek Kronos (Cronus or Cronos), the king of the Titans, personified as a father and old man. Kronos is nearly identical to the Orphic Khronos (Chronos), the primordial god of time. In the Orphic cosmogony, according to Damascius, the ineffable Creation is followed by *Hydros* (water) and mud. From these two, *Ge* (Gaia, earth) arose and solidified, thus making the first two principles Water and Earth. Khronos (Unaging Time), also called Heracles (Hercules), formed from these and became the third principle. His form "was a Serpent (Drakon) with extra heads growing upon it of a bull and a lion, and a god's countenance in the middle . . . [and] wings upon its shoulders."²⁴ Damascius recounts that the Orphics discarded the first two principles, making Khronos the first, self-created at the dawn of creation, Time being "the one principle of the universe."²⁵

Khronos was the protogenos (*protos* = "first," *genos* = "born") of Time, the Aeon who bears the zodiacal wheel. He brought forth Aither, Chaos, and Darkness, and Time generated an egg. His consort was the serpent Ananke, or Adrastia (*Necessitas*, Roman), the protogenos of inevitability, compulsion, and necessity. Ananke was of the same nature as Khronos, representing his bisexuality as the generative cause of the universe. The Cosmology of Alcman names this pair "Poros" and "Tekmor," the beginning and end of all things that came into being simultaneously. Together Time (Khronos) and Necessity (Ananke), two serpentine forms like the wind, entwined 'round the cosmic world egg, causing it to break in two. Athenagoras writes, "Its crown became the heaven, and what had sunk downwards, earth." Damascius then, in Neoplatonic fashion, turns these into a trinity: the dyad as the male and female principles, or the egg's two hemispheres, and the god Phanes, or Khronos, who he also calls Zeus and Pan (All). 29

The most well-known myth of the Titan Kronos comes to us from Hesiod's *Theogony*. One of its central motifs is the myth of succession, in which Kronos overthrew heaven, or Ouranos (Uranus), the sky god, and in turn Zeus overthrew Kronos to become ruler of the heavens. This initial act of Kronos served to liberate the children of Earth from the chaos of Ouranos, the original primordial father of the heavens whose immeasurable creative chaos stifled his own creations before they could develop. Together the Earth Mother, Gaia, and Ouranos, the Sky Father, bore many children,

of which Kronos was the "most fearsome of children who loathed his lusty father." The concupiscence and prolific creative powers of Ouranos, together with Gaia, generated the twelve Titans (Strainers). Ouranos also fathered the three Cyclopes who gave Zeus his thunderbolt and "the Hundred Handers"—terrible, brutish beings each with a hundred arms and fifty heads. The Hundred Handers were so despised by Ouranos that he shut them away, along with the Cyclopes and Titans, in Tartarus to never see the light of day. 32

His unbearable cruelty became too much for Gaia and she groaned in pain. She fashioned the adamantine sickle that Kronos used to castrate his father, tossing his testicles into the sea. After liberating his siblings, Kronos took over as ruler of the universe, or as Blavatsky tells it, "the work of generation, suspended during a moment, passes into the hands of Kronos, time, who unites himself with Rhea (the earth in esotericism—matter in general)." 33

In a similar evolution to the Roman Saturn, the ancient Sumerian god Ninurta (also Ningursu), equated with the planet Saturn, was originally a god of fertility and agriculture and later identified as a god of war. 34 Ninurta restores order from chaos, much like Kronos did in severing the members of his father. In the Sumerian poem, Lugale, Ninurta defeats the horrific mountain-dwelling demon Asag, whose power was so vile that it boiled fish alive in the water. Asag was joined by an army of stone allies, and upon defeating them Ninurta brought order to the world. He used the stones to shape the mountains so as to facilitate the flow of waters into the Tigris and Euphrates, thereby improving agriculture. 35 The imagery of Ninurta ordering the mountains and rivers brings to mind Capricorn, symbolized by the sea-goat, a strange combination of mountainous and watery creatures that can be traced back to the Sumerian god Enki. Much like Ninurta, Enki was associated with the deep waters and fertilizing humidity. 36 In India Capricorn is represented by the Makara (sea dragon).37 The goat-fish, according to Jung, is a symbol for the Sun in its yearly course, which ascends to the highest peaks, then plummets down like a fish into the sea, reaching its lowest point with the winter solstice and the onset of Capricorn. 38 Just as the Sun dies and is reborn, the fish symbolizes life, renewal, and rebirth. The separation and antagonism between the mountain and the sea, the goat and the fish, must be rectified by the hero-god.

In the *Myth of Anzu and the Tablets of Destiny*, a text from Middle and Late Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian sources, ³⁹ Ninurta restores order from chaos when he retrieves the Tablet of Destinies from Anzu, the Babylonian thunderbird, usually depicted as a lion-headed eagle or sometimes a flying stallion. ⁴⁰ Anzu betrays Enlil, usurping the Enlil-power and the gods' Tablet of Destinies for himself, thus gaining the power to control all of the gods. Ninurta is the only one who rises up to the challenge of striking down Anzu and retrieving the tablet. With the seven winds and a battle array, he confronts Anzu upon the mountain. Ninurta shoots his arrow at Anzu, but with the Tablet of Destinies Anzu is able to dissolve the bow and arrow into their original components. Ninurta then severs Anzu's pinions (wings), and before Anzu can utter a spell to stop it, Ninurta sends a dart through his heart and lungs. With the forces of chaos slain, Ninurta retrieves the Tablet of Destinies and restores the cosmic order. ⁴¹

As a creature of flight, either a dragon or lion-headed eagle, Anzu is a god of the sky. Thus Ninurta establishes order by overthrowing the sky god, just as Kronos overthrows Ouranos, separating earth and heaven and establishing order in the cosmos. The Saturnian archetype is that which separates, just as Ninurta separated the left and right wings of Anzu. It creates boundaries, definitions, and establishes law. Yet this ordering principle is opposed by the ever-impending chaos in the heart of the Saturnian archetype.

While Kronos may have begun as the hero, he too locked away the Hundred-Handers and the Cyclopes in Tartarus, when he learned that Fate would see him dethroned and defeated by one of his own children. Kronos and Rhea, the Earth goddess, bore the Olympian gods, Demeter, Hades, Hera, Hestia, Poseidon, and Zeus. To avert the prophecy Kronos "banqueted on his own young children in cannibal wise" as each of them was born. 42 Rhea, in immense grief, gave birth to her last child Zeus in secret and hid the newborn in an isolated cave. 43 Having safely hid the baby, she then took a large stone and wrapped it in a baby cloth, which Kronos unwittingly devoured. Meanwhile Zeus secretly grew in strength and courage, returning to defeat his father. He was aided by Metis, who made an emetic potion for Kronos, 44 and Zeus, being made his father's cupbearer by Rhea, mixed it with his honeyed drink. Kronos drank it down, and then began to vomit—first the stone, then the children. 45 Kronos echoed the cruelty of his own

father, Ouranos, a mythical exemplification of the unconscious mimicry of abuse passed on from one generation to the next.

Like Kronos and Zeus, Saturn's oppressive and malefic nature is opposed and balanced by the greater benefic, Jupiter. Where Saturn represents boundaries, restrictions, and limitations, Jupiter offers the opposing principles of expansion, increase, and freedom. Where Jupiter tends to excess, gluttony, and greed, Saturn provides the necessary discipline and moderation that is missing. Saturnian energy also accounts for the strategy, planning, and dedication necessary to accomplish goals. Its constancy and resistance to change may engender loyalty and trust. There is freedom to be found within the bounds of limitation, and in fact the setting of limitations is a common technique for stimulating creative innovation. The balancing effect of the opposites goes both ways, and thus we are reminded to refrain from associating any moral quality to these archetypes. Kronos, like Zeus, overthrew his father at the behest of his mother. This repeats the formula of the alchemical trinity, composed of Father (Sun), Mother (Moon), and Son (Mercury), where the filius philosophorum (philosopher's son) represents a new awareness born within the individual, and the death of the old limitations of the mind represented by the father.



Fig. 10.1. Saturn devouring the Stone of Jupiter. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

The balance between order and chaos is exemplified in the Egyptian pantheon by the gods Horus and Sebek, the crocodile god. The Egyptians called Saturn the "star of the West which traverseth heaven," and associated it with the god Horus (*Heru-ka-pet*). 46 Son of Isis and Osiris, Horus is a god of light who takes the form of a falcon or a falcon-headed man. Sebek and Horus were worshipped together in the form of a falcon-headed crocodile with a double crown. Sebek (also Suchos, Sobk) was the ancient god of the

city Crocodilopolis in Faiyum revered for his fierceness, yet he was also known as one who causes pregnancy and bestows fertility. Here again we see the twofold Saturnian nature: fecundating and fierce. For crocodiles, creatures of the Nile, were associated with both the life-giving and the destructive force of the inundation.

Another example in the Egyptian pantheon of union and opposition took the form of Horus and Set (identified with Sebek), who were sometimes represented as a two-headed man. One had the head of a falcon and the other of the Set animal, and they were known as the "two lords." The animal depicted as the Set is thought to be extinct, having been so vicious and evil that it was hunted to eradication early on in Egyptian history. It roamed the desert and had a long slender snout, erect and pointed ears, and a forked tail. Horus and Set were considered twin gods and were closely associated in the Pyramid Texts, which says as much about their rivalry as it does about their alliance. Together they provide Osiris with the assistance he needs to ascend the ladder into heaven, which is proclaimed by the deceased to be both "the Ladder of Set" and the "Ladder of Horus." 47



Fig. 10.2. Relief of the crocodile god Sebek, Temple of Kom Ombo.

Image by Hedwig Storch.

Thus the restorer of order and the arbiter of chaos work together to lead the pharaoh into the afterlife. A similar theme is presented in the "Pæmandres" (*CH* 1.8) when Man-Shepherd explains that the discord of Nature's elements (chaos), is sourced in the Will of God.⁴⁸ While representing two polar opposites, order and chaos, Horus and Set are unified as one continuous spectrum on the ladder between heaven and earth. One end cannot exist without the other. The double-headed unification in one body signifies the unification of heaven and earth, and the reconciliation of Cosmos and Chaos, Life and Death, Light and Darkness, Good and Evil.

THE ROOTS OF EVIL

Saturn is in many respects the exemplification of evil, representing death and the destructive, devouring aspect of time. For the Gnostics, Saturn was the evil Demiurge, Yaldabaoth (Ialdabaoth, Sakla, Samael), who was produced through ignorance by Sophia, the "Wisdom of Insight." It was from her that he received his power, but because he was ignorant of where this power came from, he believed himself to be God. He assigned the rulers of the seven heavens and created humanity. He also produced a son named Sabaoth (Adonai, Adonaios) of whom Yaldabaoth became jealous. Sabaoth was established over the seventh heaven, in the eighth, and was transcendent over the powers of chaos. Yaldabaoth's envy of Sabaoth was the beginning of envy itself, and from this was produced death. Sabaoth, who was placed at the right side of Pistis Sophia and called "justice," is equal to Zeus, the two having both overthrown and condemned their fathers, while Yaldabaoth, the "chief creator of chaos," was placed on the left of Sophia and called "injustice."

The name *Yaldabaoth* means "child of chaos" and his essence is a gloomy, wicked, mindless, ignorant darkness. 53 Yaldabaoth is the highest archon and first ruler with the head of a lion and body of a serpent, with eyes of flashing lightning, reminiscent of the Orphic Khronos. Carl Jung writes that "the lion, the zodiacal sign for the torrid heat of summer, is the symbol of *concupiscentia effrenata*, 'frenzied desire.' . . . In the Mithraic mysteries the snake is often shown as the antagonist of the lion, in accordance with the myth of the Sun's fight with the dragon." 54 This form

represents opposing forces united in one body, just as the Saturnian principle is both chaotic and generative.

Whichever way you paint it, there will always be shadows and light, just as there are Nephthys and Isis, comparable to the dark and bright sides of Binah. 55 As a contrasting principle to the silence and understanding of Binah lies the dark and devouring mother, the shadow side of the feminine principle, corresponding to the Moon. Saturn and the Moon are intimately related upon the Tree of Life, as Knight points out when he says "Binah is the principle behind all moon force." 56 The Moon and Saturn both relate to the night and darkness, representing opposing or complementary energies to the Sun. Yesod, the lunar sephirah, is considered the "throne" of Binah and also the gateway through which one must first pass before ascending through the other spheres.⁵⁷ As it aligns with the human energy body, the Oabalistic Yesod rests in the same area of the sexual organs as Saturn in Muladhara, the root chakra. To this may be added Saturn's number, three, number of Binah and the Neopagan Triple Goddess of the Moon: waxing, full, and waning. These are conceptualized as the three principal phases of the female life cycle, the Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Mother Nature is both a womb (Binah) and tomb (Yesod), and it is the mother that we have first contact with upon our birth into this life.

The failure to separate from the mother in our journey to adulthood leaves us at the mercy of the Dark Mother, an aspect of the psyche that expresses itself as an evil and devouring nature. Characteristic of the crocodile and the dragon, it consumes the individual, thereby preventing the ascent through the sphere of Yesod. The evil side of the greater malefic is thus encountered in our beginning ascent from the sublunary realm through its reflection in the Moon. The Dark or Devouring Mother may reveal itself archetypally in dreams as vampiric, dangerous, or violent feminine forms. In the words of Marie-Louise von Franz, the child who fails to make this separation is "fixated in the nightmare of infantile dependence and psychological incest." 58

Generally, evil is considered as an extreme form of maleficence and immorality, as the antithesis of good and the domain of demonic activity that seeks to dismantle the good of the world, and thus becomes separate from and the enemy of God or the Divine. Evil, which spells *live* in reverse, is the opposing principle to life. There seems to be some disagreement in

the Hermetic conception of evil throughout the *Hermetica*, which may be a result of various schools within the Hermetic tradition that contradicted one another. On the one hand, evil is a degeneration of the Good as it moves further and further away from the Source. Though God is immanent, evil never taints the Supreme One. Thus, "its not God, its we who are the cause of evil things, preferring them to good" (*CH* 4.8). Yet we are reminded shortly after in the same treatise that the root of everything is the Oneness of the Source (*CH* 4.10). Does this not imply that all of existence, including evil, is rooted in the One?

In the Hermetic philosophy evil is an aspect of the irrational tendencies in humanity, or the Harmony of the seven spheres of fate. Recall the words of Mead, who writes that "the Harmony is only evil apparently; it is really the Engine of Justice and Necessity [Saturn] to readjust the foolish choice of the soul that is, to purify its irrational desires, or those propensities in it that are not under the sway of right reason and philosophy." Iamblichus argues that it is not the gods or their celestial effects that are evil, for they are the essential good and the cause of good, working together toward the harmony of the one good (1.18). 62 It is, on the other hand, the partial nature of things material and earthly from which evil arises. The sensible world is unable to receive the fullness of the good from the gods and celestial bodies, and so blames the first causes for its own passions. Saturn's maleficence, then, is simply an interpretation based upon terrestrial ignorance. While Saturn's cold and oppressive effects may cause problems for the individual, there is a divine order that imparts these qualities to Saturn, which itself is of the good.

Alchemical philosophy emphasizes the unification of polarizing ideas and energies. Just as in the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang, each pole represents an extreme upon a spectrum, containing a piece of the opposite inherent within it. The difference between the extremes becomes a matter of proportion. Just as the material world is an emanation from the One, the Good is to be found there, but to a lesser degree, and thus we must admit that the opposite is also true. Where goodness expands and radiates outward, evil contracts and pulls inward toward the center, which is a natural and necessary involution into matter. In its extreme, evil is like a black hole, pulling all of the light into itself. Yet evil serves a purpose. Von Franz, in her book *Shadow and Evil in Fairytales*, asserts that "evil does not

come directly from a wrong attitude in consciousness, but from a neglected archetype in the unconscious." That which we suppress or otherwise are unable to acknowledge within ourselves finds its way into consciousness, albeit in a distorted form. Thus it may be said that Binah as the "dark mother" is in actuality a distortion. As von Franz explains, because there was no room for the shadow in the worship of the Great Mother Goddess, a necessary compensation arose in which the mother became both the good mother and the sinister witch. 64

The denial of evil necessitates an external projection in order to account for the existence of evil in our world, a projection that ultimately lands on Nature herself. The Christian conception of Satan is an example of this sort of projection; because it is inconceivable that God himself is evil, it is likewise denied within the self. Kabbalistic teachings in *The Zohar* differ in this respect, for here evil is rooted within God and identified with the fifth sephirah, *Geburah* (*Din*). In his left hand God holds Geburah, "Severity" or "Stern Judgment," and in his right the Mercy of *Chesed* (*Hesed*); Geburah remains harmonious if it remains balanced with Chesed, but can become evil if it separates itself from the balancing structure of the other sepiroth. 65

Though evil is rooted in God, it only expresses itself through separation and the lack of the mitigating influence of mercy. When we lose contact with our divinity, experiencing the anxiety of separation, we are vulnerable to the powers of evil, expressed as passion, vice, and the entrapments of the material world. Thus it is a choice, as we read in *Stobæus* (20.2): "it is within our power to choose the better, and in like way [to choose] the worse, according to our will. And if [our] choice clings to the evil things, it doth consort with the corporeal nature; [and] for this cause Fate rules o'er him who makes this choice." There is, however, a certain level of confrontation and struggle with the evil latent within us that engenders a desire to return to divinity. Hence the alchemical *opus* begins in the Saturnian darkness.

Saturn represents all things of the physical world as opposed to the immaterial realm of the soul. While in truth these are aspects of the One Thing, the differentiation is helpful as a guide in the pursuit of Divine Union. A dualistic explanation of good and evil may be necessary for the neophyte, and becomes irrelevant to the adept who has attained both gnosis of self and gnosis of God. Ultimately, it is the balance between good and

evil that Saturn helps us to achieve, for the unwillingness to consciously confront and accept the darkness in oneself will lead to an unconscious projection upon the external world. In the words of Jung, "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious."67

THE STONE IN THE BLACKNESS: BEGINNING THE OPUS

Saturn is often personified in the form of an old man with a peg leg and scythe; as the reaper, or Death; and symbolized by the color black and darkness. With Saturn we encounter the alchemical putrefactio, a rotten state of senescence and decay—the decomposition from which new life forms. Considered evil in Hindu mythology, the planet Saturn is known as the god Sani or Shani, a four-armed, vulture-riding black man wearing black clothing, sometimes mounted on a crow. 68 Saturn is the alchemical mortificatio, or destructive principle, that mutilates, tortures, and dismembers in order to facilitate regeneration. He is often depicted in alchemical symbolism as a crow and sometimes a wolf. In this regard he corresponds with the metal antimony (Stibium), called the gray wolf, that when molten, devours the other metals and forms them into alloys. 69 Antimony is related to the Earth element and considered the "offspring of Saturn." According to Robert Allen Bartlett, it is capable of rapidly dissolving gold, an attribute employed in a physical process whereby gold is purified from foreign metals. $\frac{70}{10}$ This process is illustrated in the first of Basil Valentine's Twelve Keys, where the gray wolf devours the king (gold). In the engraving (see figure 10.3) we see Saturn with his scythe and amputated leg, symbol of Saturnian dismem-berment and mutilation. He hovers over a fire in which lead is being cooked off in a process called cupellation, leaving behind gold and silver in the form of a bead. 72 Meanwhile, the gray wolf, antimony, leaps over a fire bearing an empty vessel in which his blood collects, thereafter being "fed" to the lion, "for the Lion purifies himself with the blood of the wolf." As Bartlett explains, gold and antimony sulfide (stibnite) are melted together. Impurities in the gold form sulfides that are skimmed off, while the gold and antimony fuse into an alloy. Then the antimony is driven out of the gold by a stream of heated air, leaving behind gold in its purified form, which then becomes a powerful medicine. 74

On a spiritual level, what rests in Saturn's fire is the philosophical egg, representing all of the elements, or the *prima materia*, the unconscious, which must be broken open at the commencement of the work. Within the depths lie many impurities that are removed through the art. It is not by avoiding the wolf that consciousness is refined, but by letting it devour us, thereby merging with it. We see the Red Solar King (gold) and the White Lunar Queen (silver), royal opposites overseeing the beginning of the *opus* as they stand at its completion, wed locked in the *hieros gamos*, or sacred marriage. In her right hand the Queen bears the three principles as flowers upon a united stem (Sulfur, Mercury, Salt), and in her left hand a peacock's feather, a token of the colors that were once absorbed in the darkness of Saturn, emerging to herald the dawn. The King holds a scepter and wears a gold crown, symbols of his sovereign authority.



Fig. 10.3. Saturn and the gray wolf. From Basilius Valentinus, "Prima Clavis," in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum*, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

As the engraving of the prima clavis shows, the alchemical work begins with Saturn. From the *prima materia*, the lead of Saturn, the *lapis philosophorum* (philosopher's stone) is born: "My Child shall know, that the Stone called the *Philosophers Stone*, comes out of *Saturn*. And therefore when it is perfected, it makes projection, as well in man's Body from all Diseases, which may assault them either within or without, be they what they will, or called by what name soever, as also in the imperfect Metals." As Maier explains, "Truth is discovered in darknesse, and nothing comes into existence without blacknesse. . . . Blacknesse therefore is Saturn, the Discoverer of Truth who devours a Stone instead of Jupiter. For Blacknesse is a dark cloud covering the Stone at first so that it cannot be seen." Within the darkness awaits all of the unknown contents of the first matter, the well of unconscious material that poses the danger of overwhelming the psyche; hence the many allusions to the perils of the alchemical work throughout the literature.

The opening of the *prima materia* either precedes or is included in the first phase of the opus, called the nigredo, or blackening. Thus we see that Saturn, source of the philosopher's stone, ushers in the *opus* with a swing of his scythe. Alchemical images pertaining to this phase are often depictions of death, dismemberment, funerals, graves, coffins, skeletons, ravens, and spiders. It is where we begin and where we end, as much the dark womb of rebirth as it is the fetid tomb. In a negative sense it is expressed as melancholia, hopelessness, depression, and the torment of grief. As Hermes teaches in excerpt 24 of Stobæus, it is from "gloomy Kronos" that we draw our tears. 77 and Saturn is the first of the spheres that we encounter in our descent into the body. Likewise with the Saturnian nigredo we face the suffering of life separated from its source, powerlessness, impotence, and rigidity. Nigredo phases in our life may include mania, suicidal ideation, and creative drought, in which the death of the ego is a symptom of the separation of the soul and spirit from the body, leaving it subject to all the base fears and anxieties of physical existence.

At the core of this Saturnian gloom is the contractive impulse to go inward, to rest and regenerate, to set boundaries and limits, or to make separations—all necessary for healing and for cultivating authentic creativity. Further, the Earth element provides the solid ground from which to embark on the journey of self-discovery and to stay balanced in the process. The text accompanying figure 10.4 reads,

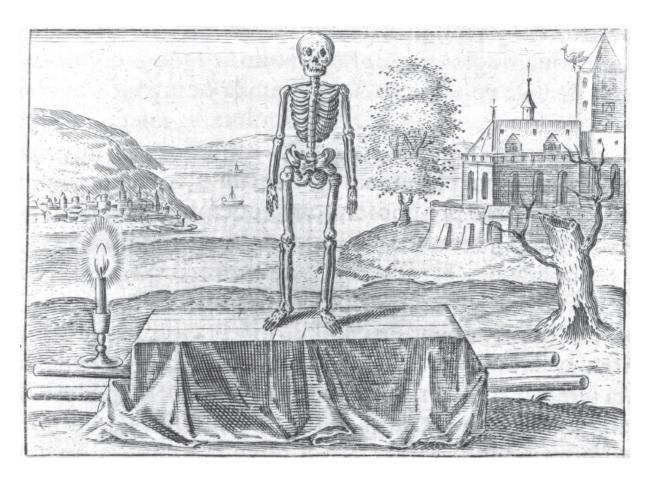


Fig. 10.4. Though Death has made a skeleton of the Body, and the tree has been made a stump, yet there is a candle burning.

From Basilius Valentinus, "Clavis IV," *The Twelve Keys,* in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum,* Frankfurt, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

All flesh that is derived from the earth, must be decomposed and again reduced to earth; then the earthy salt produces a new generation by celestial resuscitation. For where there was not first earth, there can be no resurrection in our Magistery. For in earth is the balm of Nature, and the salt of the Sages. 78

Hence through our ability to endure the dark Saturnian contraction and decomposition, we come to be revived and find the salt—a restructuring of the body and the thoughts that compose it. To be broken down to our most basic components and stripped of our fleshly identifications, we come to know the eternal essence that abides in the presence of all material fluctuations and dissolutions. Thus from the blackness of Saturn is generated "an obscure Whitenesse," the breaking of the light into the fathomless dark night and the beginning of a phase of purification, the *albedo*, in which the child of Saturn leads us onward.

TRANSCENDING TIME

The prima materia is our "first mother," the Great Mother (Mot), or the mass of undefined potential from which all of the cosmos is generated. In approaching the first matter it may be helpful to think of the Greek mother goddesses: Gaia, identified with the Phrygian Cybele (Magna Mater); Demeter, the mother of the harvest; and Gaia's daughter Rhea. These figures embody a gentle and merciful influence. Through the medium of the son, they act to soften the father for the liberation of trapped energies. Rhea, whose name means "flow," is the personification of nature, life, and fertility. As the wife of Kronos she represents the flow of time as a continuously regenerative stream, just as she represents the flow of menstrual blood, birth waters, and breastmilk, providing balance to the more aggressive and devouring symbolism of Kronos. It is true that time both gives and takes away. To be in flow with the rhythms of nature and the cycles of time provides a sense of ease, of being held in the arms of the mother, experiencing the fecundity of nature and faith in new life arising from death.

Like death, time is simply a marker of change, while the true nature of the Cosmos, and of the One, is eternal and immutable. In the words of Hermes (Stob. 6), "past joining present, and present [joining] future, they [thus] are one; for they are not without them in their sameness, and their oneness, and their continuity. Thus, [then], time's both continuous and discontinuous, though one and the same [time]."80 The Hermetica teaches that before there is time, there is eternity, which is made by God (CH 11.2). Eternity then generates the cosmos, which begets time—change, increase and decrease—held and realized by the indestructible cosmos (CH 11.2).81 From time comes becoming—life and death, but eternity will never be subject to decay, nor will the cosmos, which is the work of eternity (CH 11.3).82 The destruction of things wrought by time is simply "the dissolution of their union" (CH 11.15).83 These changes are rearrangements within the omniform cosmos; while the physical body dissolves with death, the eternal soul carries on and is renewed. Our attachment to the body keeps us locked in darkness and the suffering of death (Asc. 27.4). When we conceive ourselves as being bound by time—by the rings of Saturn, the great devourer, in a world of death—we suffer. Like the twin serpents Khronos and Ananke coiled around the cosmic egg, we are devoured in the embrace of time and fate.

Fear, the contractive quality of the root chakra (*Muladhara*), arises when there is not enough time to accomplish one's goals or desires, or alternatively at the inconceivable notion of eternity, but most of all the fear of death haunts the soul that has not attained gnosis of its eternal nature. Saturn, the old man and the crone, leads us into senescence and the end of life, inviting us to reflect on all that we have sown throughout our lives and all that we have left unaccomplished. Saturn's discipline and structuring influence serves the middle stages of life and the responsibilities held, but the old man/crone represents the stage of relinquishing the life role, a slowing down of the life-force, the descent into senility, and a decreased capacity for engaging physically with the world.

Realizing the indestructibility of the soul is to transcend the Saturnian limitations of time and death, embodying the immortal self while accepting the body's dissolution. This is a process of becoming identified with the transcendent Self, beautifully stated by Mind to Hermes in *CH* 11.20:

Make, [then,] thyself to grow to the same stature as the Greatness which transcends all measure; leap forth from every body; transcend

all Time; become Eternity; and [thus] shalt thou know God.

Conceiving nothing is impossible unto thyself, think thyself deathless and able to know all—all arts, all sciences, the way of every life.

Become more lofty than all height, and lower than all depth. Collect into thyself all senses of [all] creatures—of fire, [and] water, dry and moist. Think that thou art at the same time in every place, in earth, in sea, in sky; not yet begotten, in the womb, young, old, [and] dead, in after-death conditions. And if thou knowest all these things at once—times, places, doings, qualities, and quantities; thou canst know God. 84



Fig. 10.5. Old man Saturn in the Philosopher's Garden, watering the roots of the ever regenerating and multiplying trees of the Sun and Moon.

From Michael Maier, A Subtle Allegory Concerning the Secrets of Alchemy, in Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum, Frankfurt, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

This unbound conception of the self is the antidote to Saturnian constriction and contraction that keeps us locked in states of fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. Saturnian lessons take us right to our deepest fears of death and the unknown, yet they often present themselves around the "little deaths" of our lives—those moments when we must let go of something precious and surrender to the pain of loss, separation, disappointment, failure, loss of power, and destruction. While Saturn certainly represents difficult energies, the fires of transformation are created from the friction we encounter in life—those places where we are forced to face our own limitations, and the "constant" energy that underlies discipline and the motivation to change—to step into the flames of calcination.

The challenging aspects of Saturn—time, structure, limitations, change—provide the pressure necessary for evolution, like the intense pressure required in the formation of diamonds deep beneath the surface of the earth. On Saturn, the immense atmospheric pressure increases as you descend toward the core and is enough to turn hydrogen, a gas, into a liquid state and finally into a solid metal. Likewise, Saturn provides a consolidating energy that brings form to the formless in the process of creation. Saturn reminds us of the value of time—to not squander the time that we have been given, while fostering a deep understanding of the importance of rest and periods of darkness.

Surrounding and nurturing the roots of our human experience is the rich humus of our shared human history. It forms an invisible substrate from which we grow into ourselves and into our understanding of reality. Everything we do and experience in our lifetime is informed by and held within the context of those who have lived and died before us. In the search for truth, we reach back in time to the wisdom of our predecessors and the ancient races that once walked the earth. The words, myths, and images they left behind provide us clues and directives as to how to live a life of truth and help us to see that the human condition has always been an enigma that great minds devoted their lives to understanding. However, as

much as we can gain from studying the wisdom of the ancients, ultimately we are each singularly responsible for our own salvation, and must each find our own way to the light.



Jupiter The Sovereign Storm



Wisdom is one thing . . . it is willing and it is unwilling to be called by the name Zeus.

—HERACLITUS

WHERE DO WE TURN when we are confronted with the pains of growing beyond the limitations and constructs of the mind? We may need a force that can support us as we grow into a new body, a force to manage the weather of our emotions and the storm of changes taking place within us. We may need a father figure that is just and righteous, a king that will lead us and bless us in the battle and protect us from danger. We will certainly need the vision to see where we are headed, and the material resources necessary to get there. This leader exists within us as the archetype of Jupiter, the magnanimous bestower of fortune, power, and wisdom. When we are ready to expand our horizons, Jupiter is there to guide us. He leads the rebellion when we are liberating ourselves from outmoded ways of being and thinking, helping us to dissolve old mental constructs that shape how we see ourselves and the world. He is the creative impulse that carries

us forward, a powerful gravitational force, drawing in resources and expanding our range of influence. Harnessing and integrating this mighty force is a matter of recognizing and understanding just how powerful the creator within really is.

The planet Jupiter is named after the Roman god of the sky and ruler of the heavens, sometimes poetically called Jove (Latin *Iovis*), the god from whom dreams and visions descend. Jupiter derives from the Latin *Iuppiter*, compounded from the Proto-Indo-European *dyeu-peter, "god-father," and the name of his Greek equivalent, Zeus, means "bright" or "shining," from dewos, or "god." According to Manetho the Egyptians called Jupiter "the radiant star" (*Phaethôn*). This shining god is the ruler of the clouds and the weather, particularly of storms, lightning, and thunder. As the king of the Olympian gods, Zeus presides over the affairs of humanity and the gods alike, establishing law and order, and administering justice and punishment from his abode on Mt. Olympus. His interest in human relations extends to the bonds of friendship and loyalty. Thus when the gods are asked what they will provide for humankind as described in "The Virgin of the World" (1.17), Zeus declares: "So that the race which is to be may not forever fight, already for them have I made Fortune, and Hope, and Peace."

Jupiter was identified with the primary god of the ancient Mesopotamians, Marduk, whose supremacy was such that many of the other gods were simply seen as aspects of him, for he was called Bel, "Lord" of the gods of heaven and earth. He was associated with magic, wisdom, water, vegetation, and judgment, and like Zeus, he was the "wisest of the gods." Just as Zeus restored order to the cosmos by liberating his siblings from the belly of Kronos (Saturn, Chaos), establishing his supremacy over gods and humanity, in the Mesopotamian myth *Enuma Elish* (the Babylonian Epic of Creation), the hero-god Marduk restores order by slaying Tiamat, the primeval goddess of the sea and embodiment of Chaos, and reclaiming the Tablet of Destinies. Through his victory Marduk is made "king of all the gods," praised for his sovereignty and the power of his utterance to destroy and to create.

Marduk is related to the earlier Sumerian god Ea/Enki or Enlil (*Ellil*, Akkadian), also a Mesopotamian hero-god and "great god" whose name means "Lord Air," with the epithet "king of the storm." Recall that Enlil was created from the union of Heaven (An) and Earth (Ki), and thereafter

separated the two in the ordering of the cosmos. Enlil is also called "lord of abundance," whose powers include establishing peace and promoting fertility in the land, as well as the power to cause catastrophe and famine.⁹

As the "ruler of heaven" and "governor of weather," Jupiter *Fulgurator* is the wielder of the thunderbolt, paralleled by the vajra of Indra, the Vedic god of rain and thunder, and the club of Dagda, "the good god" of the Irish, a club that could both take and restore life. 10 Vajra is a Sanskrit word that means both "thunderbolt" and "diamond," representing spiritual force and indestructibility. It is interesting to note that the *Voyager* spacecraft detected lightning in Jupiter's clouds, 11 and scientific research has proposed that carbon in Jupiter's high-pressure atmosphere may be turned into "diamond rain." 12 Jupiter as the wielder of the lightning bolt and ruler of the heavens is correlative to the electricity present throughout the human body, especially in the central nervous system.

Jupiter is the "Sovereign of the Gods" and bears the Aegis shield. Aspiration and victory, power and strength are eternally at his side. The king of the gods, Jupiter wears a crown of oak leaves, a kingly tree sacred to him. He is a god of destiny, battles, and power, bestowing blessings and protection on the battlefield. As Jupiter *Terminus* he is the defender of boundaries, just as the planet itself gathers up large asteroids in its powerful gravity, defending the boundaries of the solar system and protecting Earth from potentially deadly impacts. He is often shown holding a scepter, which Crowley calls "the weapon of authority referring to Jupiter (*Gedulah*, magnificence)." To

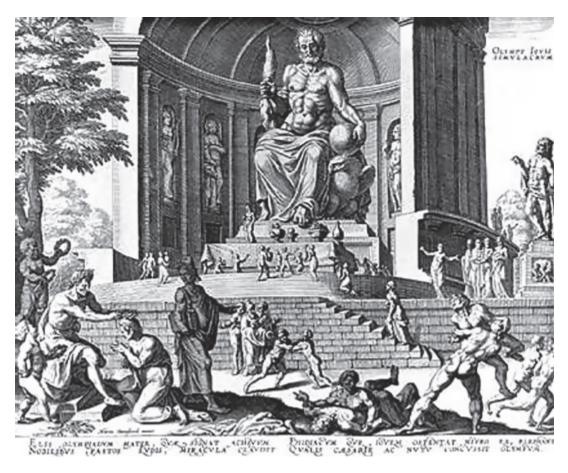


Fig. 11.1. A drawing of a statue of Zeus, depicted with thunderbolt and eagle. By Maerten van Heemskerck. 1572.

With thunderous power Jupiter is the Father and Creator, for which reason the Pythagoreans called God by the name of *Jupiter*, a name "which in the original tongue is taken from a word that signifies 'Life,' for He who gave Life and Being to all things ought to be called by a name derived from His power." In consonance with this, Jupiter's equivalent in the Gnostic scriptures is the Archon (Ruler) Iaō (Greek), or Yao, a form of Yahweh, the ineffable name of God, and the androgynous son created by Yaldabaoth (Saturn). Iaō is invoked in conjunction with Zeus in the *Greek Magical Papyri* as "First angel of [the god], great Zeus. IAŌ" (*PGM* 1.300). At other points in the papyri he is identified with Helios, Sarapis, and Mithra (*PGM* 4.1715; *PGM* 5.5). 22

FERTILITY AND FORM

The ancient Mesopotamians called the planet Jupiter the "star of god Marduk." Jupiter had many names in Mesopotamia, including *MULLugal*, meaning "king," *MULUD.AL.TAR*, meaning "victorious daylight" or "frightful splendour," and *MUL2BABBAR*, "bright star," or "the white star." Its bright white light signified the coming of peace and plenty, but it was also an evil omen in connection with the Moon, except during lunar eclipses. However, in a similar fashion to Saturn's association with the Sun, Jupiter was sometimes identified with the Moon. In Vedic astrology, Jupiter is identified with Vrihaspati, the "preceptor of the gods" who was also equated with Agni. Those born under this planet are said to be "endowed with an amiable disposition, possess palaces, gardens, lands, and be rich in money and corn," along with possessing "much religious merit, and [having] all his wishes gratified."

In Hellenistic astrology, Jupiter is known as the Greater Fortune and is considered to be of beneficial, jovial, and fortunate influence, bringing wisdom, abundance, growth, and peace. Jupiter is just, kind, giving, and royal—the supreme authority. Ptolemy writes that "Jupiter has a temperate active force because his movement takes place between the cooling influence of Saturn and the burning power of Mars. He both heats and humidifies; and because his heating power is the greater by reason of the underlying spheres, he produces fertilizing winds."30 Jupiter's effects are warming and moistening, hence his epithet Jupiter Pluvius ("sender of rain"), because he sends a fertilizing golden rain from above to inseminate the earth. Indeed, in excerpt 24 of Stobæus Zeus is called the "primal source from whom Nature doth come," who engenders birth within us, and in the Asclepius (19, 27) Jupiter is described as the essence-chief of Heaven that gives life to all things, with a lower part called Jupiter Plutonius who rules over the earth and sea, nourishing mortal beings and the fruits of the earth. 31 It is the golden rain of Zeus penetrating through the roof of Danae's chamber that begins the opus, for in this act he "gilds the queen" who, like Luna, holds the key to the philosopher's stone in her womb. 32 In a similar fashion, it is said that the birth of Pallas-Athene was attended by golden showers, when she was liberated from the head of Zeus by Vulcan's ax. 33

Jupiter's fertilizing power was associated with the north wind, which is reflected in Jupiter's rulership of Pisces, which Ptolemy calls "fecund,"

while on the other hand, his other "windy" sign is Sagittarius. 34 These two signs relate to the feminine water and masculine fire of Jupiter, respectively, and the alchemical processes of Projection and Inceration, two of the final processes that make the stone into a fluid waxy substance that is capable of transmuting metals. 35 Jupiter finds his exaltation and fullness of expression in the watery sign of Cancer, detriment in the Mercury-ruled signs of Gemini and Virgo, and fall in earthbound Capricorn. Jupiter presides over Thursday, or "Thor's Day," denoting Jupiter's identification with the hammer-wielding Germanic god of thunder, Thor. His earthly reflection is found in the bright shine of the metal tin.

The star of Jupiter is said to be predominantly of a diurnal and masculine nature according to the Hellenistic sects. He is the "lord of touch, the lungs, arteries, and semen," presumably on account of his airy and moist qualities (air, in Ayurveda, is related to the skin and to touch). He also rules the liver (the largest organ), ribs, midriff, gristles, and blood. Jupiter's action in the body can also be felt in the large thigh muscles, home of Sagittarius and the fire of movement, and in the feet, the two watery fishes of Pisces. Jupiter rules the sacral chakra, or *Svadhisthana* (Sanskrit), located a few finger widths below the navel. Corresponding to the water element, this is the energy center of sexuality, creative power and generation, attachments, relationships, and feelings.

Jupiter is represented in Qabalah by the fourth sephirah, Chesed, "Mercy," which expresses itself in love, compassion, and altruism. As Rav Michael Laitman explains, Chesed "appears only within a *Kli* (desire) that wishes to give selflessly and be similar to the Creator." Chesed is the right hand of God, counterbalanced by Din or Stern judgment (*Geburah*, Mars) on the left. Chesed, whose God name is *El*, is represented by the image of "a mighty crowned and throned king," and it "emanates all rulership over the worlds of forms." Binah (Understanding), which we explored in relation to Saturn, is the *idea* of form, but it is in Chesed that these ideas cohere into forms. Thus it is the "supreme height of manifestation," because from this sephirah these forms will increase in density as they move through the rest of the sephiroth.

JUPITER-AMMON: THE HIDDEN CREATOR

The watery, creative aspects of Jupiter are exemplified by his association with Ammon, who was worshipped all over Egypt and Greece, becoming syncretized as Zeus-Ammon to the Greeks and Jupiter-Ammon to the Romans. 42 He was the analogous "king of the gods" of Egypt during the New Kingdom. 43 Ammon was identified with the bull god Mont (or Montu), a war god of the nearby city of Hermonthis associated with the Sun's destructive powers.⁴⁴ Bulls are symbols of male libidinal force, fertility, power, strength, as well as unrestrained violence. They were often considered sky gods associated with storms, lightning, and rain, as in the case of the Indian god Indra, who sometimes takes the form of a bull, symbolizing fecundity, heat, and power, or the white bull of Shiva, Nandi, who has sublimated the sexual power to become a symbol of justice and strength. 45 Likewise the signs of Marduk's name translate to "bull-calf (of) the sun,"46 and he is considered an agricultural god.47 We're reminded of Jupiter's libidinous behavior in the form of the virile bull that abducted Europa, the Tyrian maid, carrying her into the sea and to the island of Crete. 48 Symbols of water and the Moon, bulls were worshipped in relation to lunar deities throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East.

Ammon was regarded as a creative god during the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2133–1786 BCE), when he took the form of the goose that laid the cosmic egg, known as the Great Cackler (like Geb). ⁴⁹ The Platonists associated him with their demiurgos as the creator and preserver of the world. ⁵⁰ As a primeval creator god, Ammon was related to water—*aman*, meaning "water" (Libyo-Berber). ⁵¹ Ammon means "the hidden one," alluding to the secret power contained in the wind, ⁵² reminiscent of the *Tabula Smaragdina*, which says "the wind carries it in its belly." Ammon is "he who abides in all things," or "the soul (ba) of all phenomena." ⁵³ Like Jove, Ammon-Ra commanded the winds and the clouds through his voice of thunder. ⁵⁴ Ammon may be likened to the philosophical water of the alchemists, which is the mysterious invisible "Magnus Æther" ⁵⁵ that permeates and gives rise to all of creation, for it contains all of the elements

within it, from which "sprung the first idea of a personal creative deity," as stated by Blavatsky. $\frac{56}{}$

Ammon was later worshipped in the form of a ram or ram-headed man, or a man with ram's horns, as was Zeus-Ammon. He was considered a protector and leader of the flocks, a role that extended to humanity. In the *Fabulae* of Hyginus, Liber, the son of Jove (Zeus) by Proserpine, "was hunting for water in India, and hadn't succeeded, [when] ram is said to have sprung suddenly from the ground, and with this as guide he found water. So he asked Jove to put the ram among the stars, and to this day it is called the equinoctial ram. Moreover, in the place where he found water he established a temple which is called the temple of Jove Ammon." Ammon later came to be associated with the sign of Aries, the Ram, or Zeus disguised in a ram's skin. The watery aspects of Zeus-Ammon, joined with the fiery active strength of the ram, likewise reflected in the watery female and violent male aspects of the bull, represent polarities of the god that combine in the process of creation.

Ammon was sometimes known by the name Kematef, and as such he was depicted as a snake. Kematef is the "one who has completed his time," for returning us to the process of growing beyond our own limitations just as the snake sheds its skin. The growth of our new skin is a creative act that begins with the imagination. Jupiter-Kematef also relates the serpent-ouroboros, who, tail-in-mouth, reconciles and unifies the ages. In the *Poetica Astronomica* by Hyginus, the constellation Draco, from the Latin *draconem* meaning "huge serpent," is given its origin as the snake that guarded the golden apples of the Hesperides in the Gardens of Juno. Serpents are a symbol of the life-force, the potent *kundalini* energy that sleeps in the sacrum and rises up the spine in the process of awakening. Unlocking our hidden creative capacities is part of this process, which requires that we dissolve limitations and release attachments.

THE ALBEDO: DISSOLUTION OF THE SATURNIAN ASHES

In the Orphic Hymn to Jupiter (15), he is called the "source of abundance, purifying king," 62 which correlates with his role in the alchemical *opus*.

While the *nigredo*, associated with Saturn, worked upon the root chakra and our identification with the body and our mental constructs, the next phase of the *opus* is the *albedo* (*leukosis*, whitening), a phase of purification and a flood of wisdom and insight. Moving up from the Saturnian root, the *albedo* corresponds with the sacral chakra, *Svadhisthana*, and also to *Ajna*, the Third Eye, which is ruled by Moon. Jupiter is the creative power of *Svadhisthana*, which becomes obscured by a number of factors, including attachments, lust, gluttony, excess, compulsion, and addictions, and must be freed up to be fully expressed. Thus it is necessary to break apart and dissolve attachments—bonds—just like salt that dissolves in water, or metals dissolved in philosophical Mercury.

In alchemy the dissolution is a process of further purification after the initial calcination and reduction to ashes. These ashes are the salts that are now dissolved in the *aqua vitae*, the "water of life." When the salts have been dissolved, the solution is then evaporated, leaving behind the salts in a more purified state. The purified salts may then be calcined again and the process repeated for increased levels of purification. Salt, relating to Saturn, the earth, and the body, is also a symbol for wisdom attained in the various stages of the *opus*, as ashes remaining after the fiery calcination that burns away the impurities of the soul, or the salty residue left behind after the emotional waters are evaporated.

With the dissolution, the boundaries between internal and external worlds dissolve and we merge in *unificatio* with the mysterious Æther, our psyche bathed in a sea of dreams, fantasies, and symbols. This process changes the way that we see reality, separating us from our normal day-to-day awareness and opening us up to new possibilities and dissolving old limitations. In this sense it is a Jupiterian expansion of awareness that brings us beyond the bounds of our known experience. What was once inaccessible to consciousness is now perceived as a living reality that penetrates into the depths of the soul. Thus a union is established between within and without, providing deep insights as the unconscious begins to be integrated. As Jung notes, "Just as the father represents collective consciousness, the traditional spirit, so the mother stands for the collective unconscious, the source of the water of life." Since Jupiter is the traditional father figure, then the *unificatio* of the dissolution is between father and mother, conscious and unconscious, known and unknown, and

the outer and inner worlds. As von Franz explains, the subjective experience of the symbols emerging from the depths is at first a separation from the material outer world, followed by a reconnection between the inner and outer experience. Suspended in the watery embrace of the mother, the sea of the unconscious, there is a comfort that softens the difficult lessons of the *nigredo* and opens us up to continue on our path of self-realization. Energetically, the dissolution may also be experienced as an out-of-body sensation, floating, lightness, and spaciousness.

The *albedo* is a lunar process, illuminating the lunar qualities of Jupiter, and dissolution is assigned to the Moon's domicile in Cancer. In John Dee's *Monas Hieroglyphica* (theorem 12), he relates the *albificatio* (whitening) to the four "lunar" planets and the four elements, relying upon the hieroglyphic signs for the planets as keys to their lunar or solar nature. The crescent upon the symbol for Jupiter places this planet in the lunar set of hieroglyphic signs, which proceeds in the order of Saturn, Jupiter, Luna, and Mercury.

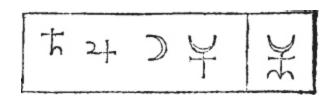


Fig. 11.2. Lunar symbols of John's Dee's theorem 12. From Dee, John, and George Fabyan Collection, *Monas Hieroglyphica*, 1564.

Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

Each figure is related to the one before it as they rotate and separate, then recombine in a process of purification. According to N. H. Clulee, in the essay "Astronomia Inferior: Legacies of Johannes Trithemius and John Dee," the lunar qualities are increased with each successive symbol. It is in essence the application of the Moon to the four elements, symbolized by the cross, to purify the mercurial or lunar principle within them, leading to the generation of lunar mercury, which Dee symbolizes by the crescent mounting the cross (see figure 11.2, fourth symbol from left). 66 Mercury

and the Moon both pertain to the mind, and thus we may interpret the *albificatio* as the purification of the four elements on the mental plane, through circulations of thought, separation from the material world (as in the third figure from left where the cross has separated from the crescent), the *coniunctio*, and the birth of the lunar mercury, the white stone, or "Hydrolyth,' the water-stone." The circle of the Sun is in absentia in Dee's figure, for that is the last stage of the *opus*, the reddening (*rubedo*).

Dissolution engenders a sense of relief, lightness, fluidity, expansiveness, insight, and clarity, as thoughts and emotions are cleansed by the *aqua vitae*. The calcining flame has no more fuel, and the white Saturnian ashes are thrown into the floodwaters of the Nile. Patterns that have been rigidly set give way and are broken apart and dissolved in the waters of renewal, and consciousness expands to embrace unconscious symbols, deepening our personal relationship with the Divine. We experience a release that will birth a new creation as the muddy banks are fertilized and new growth arises from the earth, energy rising to the heavens in reverence. For the flood is the mourning of Isis-Sophia, who reclaims the missing parts of Osiris, and whose grief is soothed by self-born Wisdom. In releasing the old, new things come forth.

The *albedo* is often symbolized by images of a white swan, symbol of purity, feminine beauty, and grace, at home in the air and water. It was in the form of a swan that Zeus coupled with the beautiful mortal, Leda, a transformation into a purer form by which to seduce the goddess. Leda is also etymologically related to Leto, or Latona, the mother of the twins Artemis (Diana) and Apollo, the Moon and Sun. Other symbols of the *albedo* include baths, fountains, doves, the pelican piercing its own breast, and eagles.

JUPITER'S ROYAL EAGLE: IT RISES TO HEAVEN, AND DESCENDS AGAIN TO EARTH

The white eagle is sometimes employed as a symbol for the white phase of the *opus*. In the process of distillation, the essence—the oil or soul—of the body flies like the eagle ascending to heaven toward the top of the retort,

and then descends again as it condenses and flows into a receiving vessel. However, the golden eagle is an emblem of the Sun, which is recognized in the mythologies and religions of cultures across the globe, including the American Indians, Arctic and Asiatic cultures, Japanese, Aztecs, Indians, and ancient Greeks. The sacred bird of Jupiter, *Aetos Dios*, is a giant golden eagle that served as his messenger. Zeus chose the eagle, "because it alone, men say, strives to fly straight into the rays of the rising sun." In Pliny's estimation "Eagles excel both in Honour and Strength," and "It is said that the Eagle only is never smitten with Lightning; and therefore it is judged that she serveth Jupiter as his Armour-bearer." This solar association of the eagle is attributed likewise to Christ, as a symbol of his Ascension and of kingship. It represents soaring upward toward enlightenment, undaunted by the burning rays of the Sun, capable of looking directly into its brilliance.

Like the golden rains of Jupiter, the eagle also signifies the descent of the heavenly father to penetrate the body of Nature. In the myth of Zeus and Danaë, her father imprisons her in a bronze chamber to prevent her from having a male son, for it was prophesied that this son would kill the king. Zeus, however, penetrates the roof of Danaë's bronze tower, or in some versions of the myth a subterranean bronze chamber, where she is kept hidden, and impregnates her with his golden rains. In one Hermetic illustration of this myth the golden rains are pictured as emitted by an eagle, and Perseus, the offspring from the union of Zeus and Danaë, was described by Lycophron as "the eagle son of the golden Sire." Like the lightning bolt striking the Tower (sixteenth arcanum of tarot), this golden perception penetrates a stronghold of the mind, to reach within and impregnate the unconscious with a new perception. It is an explosive, terrible, shocking realization as the previous safety afforded by this stronghold is falling away, and with it, the false self.

Just as the eagle rises to heaven and descends again to earth, it flies east and west in search of the equilibrium of the authentic self. The founding of the Delphic Oracle was said to have occurred when Zeus sent two eagles in opposite directions, one to the east and one to the west, to locate the *omphalos* (Greek), the "navel" and center of the world. The two birds, flying at equal speeds, returned to one another, crossing paths above the area known as Delphi, which was proclaimed to be the center of the world.

Omphalos also refers to the stone that Rhea fed to Cronus in place of the baby Zeus, which was memorialized in a stone sculpture called the Omphalos and kept in the adyton, a sacred inner chamber of the temple at Delphi. The two eagles of Jupiter take on the duality of east-west, in effect to find the true center of the Self. This is the separation that is a requisite part of individuation, which culminates in the reunion of the pair and the ultimate union of the male-female polarities. Like the axis mundi, the omphalos is that which unites heaven and earth. Thus speaks Sol in the Rosarium Philosophorum:

From my earth there springs a fountain
From which two rivers come forth
The one holds his course towards the East
The other towards the West
From whence two Eagles flying burn their feathers
And being bare and naked fall again to the earth
These Eagles are presently renewed with fair feathers
And both Sol and Luna are subject to them.⁷⁴



Fig. 11.3. Jupiter's Royal Eagles in search of the Omphalos. From Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618. Courtesy of Science History Institute.

What the eagle really alludes to is the relationship of Jupiter to the Sun and Moon, which is one of compensation that serves to unify the opposition of fire and water, since Jupiter partakes of the nature of both. We are reminded of a passage from Pliny's *Natural History* that speaks to this:

In Dodonè, the Fountain of Jupiter being exceedingly chill, quencheth lighted Torches when dipped therein; but if you hold the

same near it when they are extinguished, it setteth them on Fire again The Fountain of Jupiter Amman in the Daytime is cold, and all Night it is boiling hot. 75

In both the *Rosarium* passage and Pliny's what we see is a submission of the Sun and Moon to the powerful gravity of Jupiter, who holds the power to initiate the *enantiodromia*, changing each into their opposite. On the other hand, the water of Jupiter compensates for the powers of the Sun and Moon, becoming their opposite—cold when the Sun's fire is strong in the daytime, and hot when the coolness of the Moon prevails. Thus we are advised: "Out of two Waters make One, and that will be the Water of Sanctity."

LIGHTNING: THE SECRET FIRE

Alchemically, the eagle also refers to sal ammoniac, ⁷⁷ due to its lightness in sublimations. ⁷⁸ According to Manly P. Hall, sal ammoniac derived its name from the Temple of Jupiter-Ammon in the desert of Egypt, ⁷⁹ where deposits of ammonium chloride are found. ⁸⁰ Sal ammoniac (*) is a mineral composed of the salt, ammonium chloride (NH4Cl), and it represents a female, passive, and fixed aspect.

While sal ammoniac represents the feminine, saltpeter is the male mineral salt. In alchemy, the dragon is a symbol for saltpeter, also known as niter, used for fertilizer and one of the principal ingredients in gunpowder. The glyph for saltpeter (①) is a circle with a vertical line through it, where the circle represents consciousness and the vertical line is the ascent of consciousness through the material realm. This is in contrast with the glyph for salt (②), with the horizontal line relating to the material realm. Saltpeter is a colorless-to-white mineral form of potassium nitrate (KNO3) that typifies a male, volatile force capable of explosive and fiery action, like the dragon. John Isaac Hollandus asserts that saltpeter is the "King and Lord of all salts," and Jacob Boehme referred to saltpeter as the "firecrack" and the "schrack," or the "secret fire," comparable to lightning and symbolic of "the seed of the entire godhead." It is this secret fire that is necessary in the process of awakening to one's divine nature.

This fire-crack is the Jupiterian lightning force, analogous to the *kundalini* of the Hindu yogic philosophies, which rises from the pelvic basin, where it sleeps like a coiled-up serpent or dragon. In alchemical operations, niter (saltpeter) is used in the creation of nitric acid, known as *aqua fortis* (strong water), which has a corrosive effect capable of dissolving most metals (except gold). Combining *aqua fortis* with hydrochloric acid (acid of sea salt) will create *aqua regia*, "regal water" or the "king's water," a yellow-to-red liquid that can be used to dissolve the noble metals, gold and platinum. Thus the *kundalini* is the energetic means of dissolving the seven metals, or opening the chakras. Dennis William Hauck equates the secret fire with inspired thought and imagination, ⁸³ which is stimulated by the *kundalini* rising through the caduceus and expressing itself through the brow chakra, ruled by the Moon.

This symbolic representation of the dragon as saltpeter is found in the emblem for the Third Key of Basil Valentine. The text explains a process of preparing the "incombustible Sulphur of the Sages," another name for the secret fire, which is described as "living fire; it is quick, and quickens and matures lifeless substances." In the background of the illustration we see a cock (rooster) and a fox, further illustrating the qualities of Jupiter that have to do with life, death, regeneration, and the part of fortune. At the end of the passage accompanying the image it is explained, "the Cock will swallow the Fox, and having been drowned in the water, and quickened by the fire, will in its turn be swallowed by the Fox."

To understand this, let us look at the symbolic meanings of these two animals. Michael Maier says the rooster is "raised to the Sun, with whom He both rises and goes to sleep,"87 a bird of the dawn and of the east. On the other hand, the Fox is "Semper peccator, semper justus' (ever sinning, ever righteous)," a creature of duality who possesses the "elixir of life" and yet is also associated with demonic possession. 88 It is this latter quality that makes the fox suitable as a conductor of souls, for they live in the dark hollows of earth, in the underworld. Foxes also have associations with longevity, and they are esteemed by the Chinese as creatures who greet the sunrise with prostrations until they are able to "live among mankind without being noticed."89 This is an effect of the purifying powers of the Sun, heralded by the rooster, which dispels the darkness. To borrow the words of Fabricius, "cock and sun are archetypal father symbols, while the brooding

hen is a mother symbol of similar universality." Thus we may infer a likeness of the cock as a symbol for the Sun and Zeus-Ammon in his paternal and solar role, and the fox with the lunar and watery qualities of Jupiter.

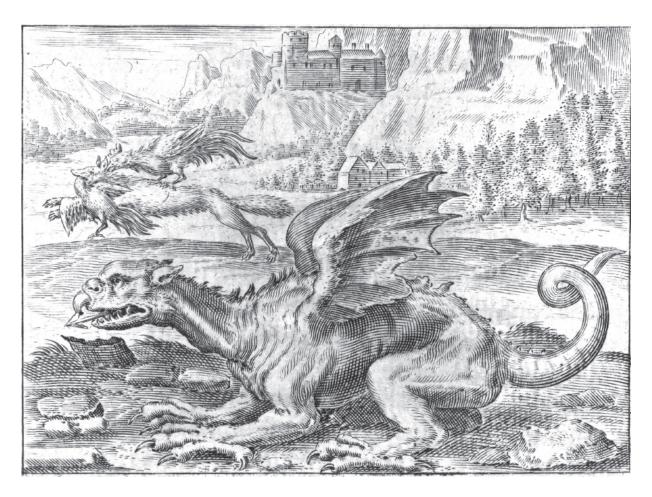


Fig. 11.4. The dragon is the secret fire. From Basilius Valentinus, "Clavis III," *The Twelve Keys,* in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum,* Frankfurt, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

The fox, both amorous and mercurial, represents the feminine polarity of Jupiter as well as his unmitigated desire for freedom, which must be reigned in by the *coniunctio* with the Sun. The solar rooster—or Jupiter's masculine nature—with its willful pride, staunch individualism, and workaholism, who announces with his crow the first light of day and the hours of production, consumes the fox as the day "consumes" the night.

Thus the sulfuric and fiery will of the cock consumes the desires of the lunar, mercurial fox, which marries the will with the desire. As the night, in its turn, consumes the day, this becomes the question of "my will" vs. "thy will," or the will of the magician vs. the surrender and faith in a higher order unfolding. Until the willful Sun is consumed by the uncertainty of night, it believes itself to be the sole creative force, forgetting that the dark is where reality is germinated.

The Sun is the dawning light of Apollo, whose birth by the lunar goddess Leto was attended by a cock. 91 Zeus was said to have assimilated Velchanos, the Cretan cock god, and in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the cock roosts at the center of the Wheel of Life as one of the three poisons (along with the hog and serpent), that of "lust, attachment to material things, covetousness, and 'thirst,'" 92 much like the vices of Jupiter. So it is that Jupiter, who is attributed to the Wheel of Fortune (tenth arcanum) in the tarot, is also the center point of the circle, conjuring the symbol of the Sun itself (\odot). Both the Sun and Jupiter occupy a high place in the Hermetic hierarchy as described in the *Asclepius*, for Jupiter is the dispenser of life, and the Sun dispenses light to all things. Recall that when truth is realized within the soul, the good, along with life and light, arrive to dispel all remaining darkness from the soul, sending all torments away in a "flapping of wings" (*Asc.* 19, 27; *CH* 13.9). 93

In the hermaphroditic, unified form of Jupiter *Arrhenothelus*, he is both the male, active, volatile Nitrum, the dragon or *salpetre*, as well as the female, passive, fixed *Sal*, Salt, or sal ammoniac, the eagle. Crowley writes that all two-headed eagles are symbols of the hermaphroditic Jupiter. The secret fire poses the threat of chaos and darkness when the energies are not guided up into the heavens by the white eagle. Thomas Taylor describes Jupiter's role as "unfolding into light that which is occult, expanding that which is contracted, and dividing that which is impartible in the Saturnian monad; and as emitting a second more partial kingdom, instead of that which is more total, a demiurgic instead of a paternal dominion, and an empire which proceeds everywhere instead of that which stably abides in itself." 95

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

In the Greek myth of Zeus (Jupiter) overthrowing Kronos (Saturn), he was setting the heavens free from the fear-driven, anxiety-stricken, panicked, negative, melancholic, depressive, self-obsessed, and self-limiting grips of death, synonymous with Time and all the plagues brought upon humanity when Time stands as Ruler of the Heavens. Death is the change occurring with the birth of each new moment. We are slaves to time until we come to realize the Jupiter-I-Am, exerting our own rulership of the heavens as Jupiter-Ammon, the Creator God, who has no use for time because the only concern is to be master of the storm. Thus, like Jupiter-Kematef, we have completed our time and enter a new experience of reality in timeless flow.

Linear time has its place but can be expanded by one's perception of it. In other words, time is relative to our experience of it. It moves faster or slower depending on our state of mind. Certain mind-altering substances will change our perception of time, and there are moments in life that we experience a sense of timelessness, or time standing still. Our notions of past and future are only in relationship to the present moment being experienced, existing only as concepts that help us to understand where we are right now. The past and the future exist within the totality of the present moment, and both can be influenced by the present state of consciousness that we hold. Our memories evolve and change as we continue to grow, and sometimes our memories completely deceive us. Since the past only exists as memory, the past is not fixed and can be influenced by our current state of mind to resonate in a way that serves our highest good; just as thought structures may be dissolved and reformed.

We can choose how we remember the past, in the way that we tell the story of it. Every time we tell a story of our past, to ourselves or others, we deepen its channel in our memory stream, creating a pattern within consciousness that will continue in the future. A retelling of the story allows the pattern to diffuse so that consciousness unties itself, like the knots of Nephthys—of darkness—coming undone, evolving into a new, more harmonious expression. This is a liberation of previously bound energy that can now be channeled into something positive for the self and others. It's not that we are denying the truth of the original experience, but rather we are giving it a new, positive, and empowering framework in which to live, releasing our attachment to it and any negative emotions connected with it.

As previously mentioned, Jupiter relates to the Wheel of Fortune. In Crowley's Thoth Tarot illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris, the Wheel of Fortune is topped by the Sphinx, and its upward motion is guided by Hermanubis, while it is pulled downward by Typhon, related respectively to the three principles: Sulfur, Mercury, and Salt. These are the three gunas of the Hindu system, rajas (expansiveness and the energy and brilliance of fire), sattvas (the calm of spirit, neutrality, and balance), and tamas (contraction, inertia, darkness).

Hermanubis is the ape-headed Thoth, the rajasic expansive force that counteracts the downward, tamasic pull of Typhon the destroyer, "a monster of the primitive world," volcanic, destructive, and "the father of the stormy, hot and poisonous winds." This attribution of Thoth is also seen in the Magus (first arcanum) card, where he represents the instinct that guides the will of the magician, who holds his own fortune by attending to the balance of the elements. The Wheel of Fortune can be turned toward ill or good fate. The Hebrew letter for the planet Jupiter is Kaph (\supset), which means "palm of the hand" and also implies the hub of the wheel. Each spoke is like a finger wielding a different elemental power with a positive (right hand) and a negative (left hand) polarity.

Upon the Wheel of Fortune we rise and fall by the turnings of fate, but we can take this into our own hands through harnessing our secret fire, balancing the elemental powers, and uniting the opposites within us. As Zosimos writes:

Hermes and Zoroaster have said the Race of Wisdom-lovers is superior to Fate, by their neither rejoicing in her favours—for they have mastered pleasures—not by their being struck down by her ills—for ever living at the "Inner Door" and not receiving from her her fair gift, in that they look unto the termination of [her] ills.

On which account, too, Hesiod doth introduce Prometheus counselling Epimetheus, and doth tell him not to take the Gift from Zeus who rules Olympus, but send it back again—[thus] teaching his own brother through philosophy to return the Gifts of Zeus—that is, of Fate. 97

By neutralizing the Wheel we become aligned with the Sphynx, the one who prostrates to the Sun like the fox, to reach a state of timeless longevity. Death, in a literal or figurative sense, is a passage through the underworld, and Jupiter, the creator god, is the first glimmer of light upon the horizon as this passage draws to a close. The Sun-god Ammon-Ra rises in a wondrous occasion of the peacock's tail spreading a beautiful spectrum of colors across the still dark sky, a display that truly tells us we are progressing in the work, and that the children of Saturn have returned to the world.



Mars The Flames of Transformation



Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, acting prudently and with judgment.

—HERMES

EVERY ALCHEMIST HAS A NEED FOR FIRE in the execution of their art. The element of transformation, activation, and change, fire lives inside of us to heat the athanor of our being, facilitating growth, catalyzing movement, and purifying the Body, Mind, and Soul. It illuminates the darkness and provides warmth, it brings us together and gives us life. Fire is the element of Mars, and alchemically it facilitates separations that help us to purify and refine our substance into a sublime form, providing the necessary heat for the digestion of the philosopher's stone. Yet fire must be well respected and contained, lest it be the source of conflagration and great destruction. When applied with intention and care, fire is an indispensable ally. Likewise, the sword of Mars cuts through illusions and Gordian knots,

but it may also be used in rage and violence, severing bonds, shedding blood, and causing great suffering.

Mars receives its name from the Roman god of war and battle, and also of fertility, vegetation, agriculture, and protector of cattle. He is usually depicted with helmet, shield, and sword, spear or dagger, and frequently accompanied by his lover, Venus. The virtue of Mars is courage, transmitted to us through the ætherial spirit (*Stob.* 24). On the other hand, the vice of Mars is anger, or wrath. In "The Virgin of the World" (1.17), when the gods of Heaven spoke of what they would each provide to humanity, "Ares declared he had become already sire of Struggle, Wrath, and Strife."

We see the energy of Mars in the fury, freedom, and power of a wild stallion rearing on its hind legs stamping cactus in the desert; a raging boar in a field of thistle; the devouring wolf; and the prowling jaguar. His ferocious intensity can be both transformational and destructive, depending on how it is applied. Of the winged ones Mars is the vulture, a scavenger picking at the bones of the slain; the cock that harkens the rising Sun; the fiery dragon, like the one that guards his sacred spring; the magpie; woodpecker (Picus); and finally the owl by association with Athena and as a harbinger of death. In the plant world he is the stinging of nettles, the fire of tobacco, the prick of the cactus, thistle, and hawthorn, the yellow of the buttercup, and the might of the oak. He is also associated with the harvest of the crops, a reflection of his separating function.



Fig. 12.1. Mars. Artwork by Wenceslaus Hollar, 1607–1677.

Self-assured and driven, Mars is the part of us that fights—for good intent or for the desire for power, to protect ourselves and others or to overcome by fiery strength the enemies and obstacles in our path. His irascible nature seeks to pull things apart, causing estrangement and alienation, exile, and wars. He is the patron god of military forces, police, and athletes, thieves, warriors, violent villains, and heroes alike. The month of March, named after him, is the "season when kings go out to war," and Macrobius writes that the soul develops a bold spirit (*thymikon*) in the sphere of Mars. Impetuous and reactive, Mars is quick, acting with thoughtless courage, bravado, propulsion, and force. He is the essence of maleness, testosterone, strength, and muscles.

Mars rules over Tuesdays, from the Old English *tiwesdæg*, from *Tiwes*, related to Tiu, the ancient English/Germanic war god, also corresponding to the Norse Tyr. In Latin Tuesday is called *dies Martis*, "day of Mars," or in Greek, *hemera Areos*, "day of Ares." Traditionally considered a masculine

energy, Mars relates to qualities like physical strength, domination, aggression, bravado, courage—essentially, the warrior spirit. In a positive sense the warrior is a protector and defender against injustice. The fight for personal freedom and sovereignty, the fight for the rights of the disadvantaged, and the fight against corruption and injustice are all led by the energy of Mars. The metal corresponding to Mars is iron, and as a warrior Mars is present with himself, a fiery authority with an iron will that is ready to dismantle the old paradigm and set to work transforming the world.

Mars rules the sign of Aries, the traditional time of year for beginning the alchemical opus. Pressing forth from the damp earth in an explosion of new life and awakening libido, Aries is the spark of regenerative energy of the springtime, the enthusiasm of rebirth and the striving toward the light after the long dark winter. His energy is cardinal fire, pure impulse ready for action, creativity, and renewal by purification. This is the fire of calcination that breaks us down so that we can come to terms with the things we need to let go of, and see ourselves at our most basic level, freed from our identifications. The spring crocus (Crocus sativas) rises up from the earth, from which we get the spice saffron, associated with Mars on account of its deep red color and season. Crocus also refers to the oxide of a metal, and in this case the oxide of iron (colcothar), as the salts of iron are calcined to a red or deep yellow color. It was a crocus that Zeus, in the form of a bull, breathed from his mouth to attract Europa when he abducted her to Crete. Her brother Cadmus, in his quest to save Europa, killed Ares's (Mars's) sacred dragon—a transgression that earned him an eternal year (eight earthly years) of service to Ares. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (4:563– 603) Cadmus is given Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite, as a wife, but after a life of misfortune both of them are transformed into snakes.⁸

Just as the metals exist in the caverns of the earth, to be extracted by the alchemist and improved upon by the Great Work, dragons also dwell in the depths, guarding the gold of consciousness, or as Michael Maier writes in *Atalanta Fugiens*, "the Mansion of Dragons is in Caverns of the Earth." The chaos of the *prima materia*, sea of disorganized potentiality, is sometimes represented by the basilisk, a vitriolic and mythical beast with the body of a lion or dragon and the head of a cock—all animals associated with Mars. *Basilisk* derives from the Greek *basiliskos*, meaning "little

king." Crowley writes that the basilisk is symbolic of Geburah, the sephirah of Mars, "on account of its power of slaying with the flame of its glance." 11

Mars also rules the fixed water sign Scorpio, evoking his dark side. In this autumnal expression, the water element takes on a destructive, corrosive quality, heating up through the process of decomposition and putrefaction. Hence the association between Scorpio and the thirteenth arcanum, Death, and the destructive powers of Typhon. Yet the primeval waters of regression hold within them the fish of renewal and rebirth, symbolized by the Hebrew letter *Nun* ("fish") assigned to the Death card. In the face of the terrifying powers of Typhon, who arose from the union of Gaia and Tartarus to take the place of Zeus, the Olympian gods fled to Egypt, where Ares took the form of a fish. L2 As ruler of Scorpio and Aries, Mars is a planet of death and putrefaction, marking the onset of winter, and the rebirth and renewal of life of the spring with Aries.

An aspect of the *nigredo*, the black phase or opening of the alchemical work, *putrefactio* is the necessary death from which new life may be regenerated. The philosophers of alchemy repeatedly tell us that nothing grows and increases unless there be putrefaction. An example is given in the *Rosarium* of an egg, "which first putrefies and then a chicken is engendered, which after it is wholly corrupted, it becomes a living creature." Thus we are advised to study putrefaction, which is the means of generation. Like we encountered in our journey through the sphere of Saturn, there are times when it is necessary to sit with our own darkness. Though it may be rotten and challenging to endure, transformation is taking place through internal heat. Letting the putrefaction run its course, we will eventually see a film of iridescent colors spreading over the surface of our awareness as the dark matter gives way to new life.

THE FIERY STAR AND FLAMING SWORD

The fourth planet from the Sun, Mars, "the fiery star," makes its orbit in two years (687 days). Ptolemy writes that "the nature of Mars is chiefly to dry and to burn, in conformity with his fiery colour and by reason of his nearness to the sun, for the sun's sphere lies just below him." Two moons orbit the red planet, named after Deimos (terror, fear, dread) and Phobos

(panic), children of Ares and Aphrodite, who Hesiod describes as "formidable gods who rout tight battle-lines in the chilling conflict together with Ares sacker of cities." 17

Looking at the bright, red, penetrating light of Mars in the night sky, it is easy to see why it has been associated with fire, war, and strife. The Egyptians identified the planet with Horus, also a warrior god, and in the Greco-Roman period the planet was called "the Red Horus," while the god of the planet was the sun god, Rā. In the Egyptian pantheon, the god Mars is compared to Maahes, the lion-headed god of war, called the Lord of Slaughter. Reshef (Reshpu), the armed Syrian god of war and thunder, another Martial archetype, as is Set/Seth, the wrathful one who murders and dismembers the king, Osiris, while Nephthys is "the Lady of Severity balancing the mercy of Isis."

In Vedic astrology, Mars is known as Angaraka, or Mangala (also Mangal, Kuja), who is depicted as a four-armed, red man dressed in red garments.²³ The planet is also associated with the war god Lohit ("red") and the six-headed warrior god, Kartikeya (Murugan). The Hebrew name of the planet is *Mad' im*, which means "reddening."²⁴

The Mesopotamians called the planet Mars MULNIN.SI4, "bright lord," ^dNIN.DAR.A "lord of brightness," MULMakrû and MULŠI.PA, meaning "red star."25 While Mars was primarily considered an evil omen, its varying luminosity indicated more specifically what its influence would be. When bright, its negative effects were strengthened and it augured death and warfare, and when faint it had a more beneficial influence signifying fertility and prosperity.²⁶ The ancient Mesopotamian chthonic god, Nergal (Akkadian), is the equivalent to Mars. A god of plague, famine, war, forest fires, the underworld, and fertility, 27 Nergal is "the ambusher, who spares no one." Like Nergal, Ares was also a god of plagues and epidemics. In Mesopotamian astrology, the planet Mars was sometimes called Nergal and it signified a primarily evil influence. 30 Another of the planet's names, Śalbatānu, is explained by scholars as "he, who keeps the plague lasting." 31 Mars is also called MULGIG ("black star"), and dGIBIL, denoting the Sumerian fire god, Gibil (Akkadian Girra/u), who was also the patron of magic and smithing. $\frac{32}{}$

Nergal was the consort of Ereshkigal and became the chief god of the underworld, a story that is told in the myth of *Nergal and Ereshkigal*.³³ Nergal became assimilated with Erra, the Akkadian god whose name means "to be dry, to become dried up." He was the "warrior of the gods" (*qarrâd ilî*) who brought pestilence through warfare, but he was also associated with fire, particularly the scorching sun that caused drought, parched fields, and fires.³⁴ In Greek Nergal was known as Herakles.³⁵ By the Old Babylonian period, he was identified with Gugalanna, also said to be the husband of Ereshkigal.³⁶

Mars was primarily worshipped in Thrace and Scythia (in the form of a sword),³⁷ while his primary temple was located in Rome. The Roman poets make mention of Bellona, goddess of war, as the companion, sister, or wife of Mars.³⁸ Nerio, or Nerienis, of whom very little is known, is also said to be the wife of Mars.³⁹ However it is his affair with Venus, married to Vulcan, for which he is most well known in a romantic sense; though he did have other exploits. His Greek counterpart Ares and the goddess Harmonia were the parents of the Amazons, the "breastless," so-called because they would sever their right breast in order to make more efficient use of the javelin.⁴⁰

Ares was born the only son of Zeus and Hera (Juno) with two sisters, Hebe and Eileithyia. The "piercer of shield-hides" and "man-slaying" Ares engages in battle with a lustful passion, delighting in slaughter, chaos, destruction, and terror. His motive is pure violence and aggression, bloodshed for its own sake, to which end he is often found fighting on both sides as it suits him. This earned the contempt of Zeus in the *Iliad*, who calls him the "most hateful" of all the Olympian gods, and though Ares is his son, he is "lower than the sons of heaven."

In another version of his birth story, Mars is born to Juno without the aid of Jupiter's seed. Jealous and grievous that Jupiter had given birth to Minerva (Athena) from his own head, thus negating her role as a wife and mother, Juno desperately wanted to have a child that was solely hers. Flora, the goddess of flowers, advised her of a unique flower growing in her garden that had the power to make a barren heifer pregnant. Plucking this flower and pressing it to the bosom of Juno, the goddess conceived Mars. 46

Minerva (Athena), or Pallas, with whom Mars has an inimical relationship, embodies wisdom, thoughtfulness, prudence, discipline, and strategy in war. She is inclined toward protecting homes and people. While Ares and Athena counterbalance one another with wrath and wisdom in war, Eris, daughter of Night and mother of misfortune, revels in bloodshed and slaughter. Eris calls forth war and strife, while Zeus conducts it from the clouds, and Ares darts down like a furious lightning bolt to carry it out.⁴⁷

Proclus asserts that the belligerence of Mars is the cause behind the diversity of the universe, through the stimulation of motion and division, ⁴⁸ just as Mars is the lightning bolt dividing the unity of the Tree of Life. That which cannot withstand the effectiveness of his energy simply dissolves. ⁴⁹ Through opposition the universe reveals itself, or to repeat the words of Heraclitus quoted earlier, "opposition unites. From what draws apart results the most beautiful harmony. All things take place by Strife." ⁵⁰ There is a heat exchanged within this strife, as "All things are exchanged for fire, and fire for all things; as wares are exchanged for gold, and gold for wares." ⁵¹

Ruland describes Ares as "the giver of seed, the occult dispenser of Nature in the three prime principles, and the bond of their union." Thus the force of division and motion that separates the elements from the *prima materia*, the Iliaster, is at the same time the "Assigner," which "extends the peculiar nature to each species, and gives individual form, so that it is by him that, for example, in the vegetable world, plants are endowed with root, stalk, flowers, leaves, and sap." Similarly, Jung describes Ares as "an intuitive concept for a preconscious, creative, and formative principle which is capable of giving life to individual creatures." The fire of Ares is a critical aspect of individuation and by which the alchemist is purified. In the creative process, it is that which brings corporeal form to the nothing—the Iliaster, the unconscious, the First Matter.

Ares is the active force of Zeus, as described by Quintus Smyrnaeus: "Straight from Olympus down he [Ares] darted, swift and bright as thunderbolt terribly flashing from the mighty hand of Zeus." This brings to mind the sixteenth arcanum, the Tower, which is struck by the lightning of Jupiter and toppling over in flames. The magical flaming sword of Mars is correlated by Crowley with the lightning flash that zig-zags down the Tree of Life from Kether through the sephiroth, destroying by "dividing the

unity of that against which its energies are directed." Mars corresponds to the fifth sephirah Geburah, "Severity," the sphere where justice is applied in the world of form. Whereas Binah (Saturn) is the idea of form, and Chesed (Jupiter) the initial coherence of form, Geburah is the fire of life springing forth from the material world. The directives come from its opposite on the tree, Chesed (Jupiter), and are carried out as actions through the fiery impulse of Geburah. Gareth Knight describes Geburah as a sephirah of "adjustment and assessment," and compares it to the part of the creative process in which the forms that have been brought into being are incisively scrutinized, adjusted, refined, and cleared of extraneous parts or imperfections. 57

From the initial spark of an idea to the flames of passion, Mars is the active side of imagination and the friction of creation, the fire of new life and of transmutation. Mars represents a youthful, daring, impetuous, masculine energy, which may express itself in a healthy ambition, or a need for approval and recognition. Mars, in the creative process, is the vision, focus, ambition, and drive to see something through. Like a warrior going into battle with the brush, chisel, or pen as a weapon, Mars is the force that moves with decisiveness in the physical act of creation—knowing just where to strike the canvas, just where to cut with the chisel, just which word to use. There is no hesitation in this, for in the hesitation the creative spark may die, just as a warrior that hesitates on the battlefield may receive a decisive blow. One acts without the tedium of deliberation. Yet like the wolf that maintains the balance of nature by culling the flocks, Mars gives us the keen ability to cull our creative expressions of burdensome details. With the sword of Mars we cut things apart and in the flames we break things down, purifying and refining our creations to elevate them from the unphilosophical to the Philosophical state.

In the mineral world Mars is represented by the hard-cutting quality of diamonds; by all red stones; and by the metal iron, the only one of the seven metals with magnetic properties. Iron is a hard and yet brittle metal, vulnerable to corrosion from elemental exposure (air, moisture), but it is prevalent in the Earth's crust and in the Sun and stars. The hardness of iron, along with its hot and dry qualities, is limited to the external, for it has a hidden part within it that is "cold, humid, and soft, like lead in its root." 58

Humans need iron to transport oxygen in the blood; our hearts could not function without it. The heart of the Earth is made of a small, crystallized ball of iron at the inner core, and an outer molten core made of mostly iron and nickel that surrounds it. It is because of the magnetic field generated and sustained by the outer core's convective flow (geodynamo) that life on Earth is able to exist. The magnetic field acts like a shield for the Earth extending far beyond the Earth's physical body and maintaining the atmosphere; without it we would be exposed to higher levels of solar and galactic radiation that would erode the upper atmosphere. ⁵⁹ It also acts as a means of navigation for many of Earth's creatures, including the human use of the compass.

Iron ore is the source of steel, and both of these metals are forged into weaponry as well as agricultural tools like the sickle and plough. Thus iron is as much a symbol of death as it is life, for it represents fertility and protection for the harvest. From is often associated with darkness, as in ancient Egypt where iron was identified with the bones of the god Set or with the destruction of Typhon. From this metal are made instruments of both separation and transformation, cutting things apart and uniting them together, in the same way that vegetables are cut with a knife and then reintegrated inside the cauldron.

THE ATHANOR

Before there were heating mantels, gas burners, and hotplates, alchemists used athanors for their fiery art. From the Arabic *al-tannur*, "oven," an athanor is a tower-shaped coal-burning furnace usually made of brick or clay. The design provides a slow and uniform heat useful for digestion and the preparation of the philosopher's stone. Within the athanor of our body, we are transforming and digesting the elements with the fire of life. As we enter the work of transmuting the metals within us, it is vital that we maintain a healthy inner fire.

In the esoteric anatomy of the body, the fire of Mars expresses itself in the head and face, home of Aries, while the water of Mars resides in the intestines and genitals, seat of Scorpio. Mars also governs the muscular system (the bodily will),⁶⁴ the kidneys, the gallbladder, the right nostril, and the left ear. Albertus Magnus classifies Mars as being of immoderate heat

and dryness, having a choleric complexion and disposed toward evil. He also describes Mars as "indifferent" and "quick of motion" on account of his swift two-year orbit around the Sun. 65 According to Valens, Mars is the ruler of "the blood, sperm ducts, the bile, the elimination of excrement, the parts in the rear, the back, and the underside." 66 When out of balance, Mars is experienced physically as heat, inflammation, pain, fever, migraines, swelling, burns, boils, ulcers, cuts, and surgeries.

Mars rules the solar plexus chakra, *Manipura*, the fire center that regulates the heat of the digestive organs, the bellows of the diaphragm, and our sense of vision. This center, located a few finger widths above the navel, is also the seat of our individuality, personal power, sovereignty, and assertiveness. It relates to our egoic consciousness and outward personality, or how we present ourselves to the outside world. This is also the center of anger, rage, and defensiveness, which relate to an overly expanded solar plexus, whereas lack of self-esteem, victimization, shame, guilt, and lack of willpower correspond to this chakra being blocked or underfunctioning. When balanced, *Manipura* resonates with healthy self-confidence, assertiveness, willpower, responsibility, and courage, as well as the ability to process (digest) external inputs—physical, energetic, mental, and spiritual.

Whereas our emotions are seated in the sacral plexus (Jupiter), we express our emotions through the fire of the solar plexus. Suppressing emotions leads to a suppressed digestive fire and an inhibited ability to process the experiences of life, creating problems physically and also within our psycho-spiritual experience. Our physical vitality and our creative expression both rest upon our ability to break things down into digestible particles and assimilate them. This is where the alchemical process of *separation* comes into play.

The myth of Perseus (son of Zeus and Danaë) slaying the Gorgon Medusa provides a lesson relating to the emotions of guilt and shame, and how we may separate ourselves from them in order to gain a more accurate view of who and what we truly are. Medusa was the only mortal of the three sister Gorgons, hideous queens described as having serpents or dragon scales for hair, boar's teeth or tusks, golden wings, and brass hands. Whosoever looked upon them was turned to stone. 67 Chevalier and Gheerbrandt assert that Medusa is the image of one's own monstrosity, and

that to be turned to stone is to succumb to the guilt and shame for realizing your own sin, for having "missed the mark," and knowing it in your Soul. 68 She is the inner ugliness that, when confronted, can be transformed. Her serpentine hair symbolizes this potential for transformation and the cycles of birth, death, and regeneration epitomized in the shedding of the snake's skin. However, one must take care not to look at Medusa, or the monstrous self, directly—that is to say, do not allow guilt and shame to penetrate the Soul, for that magnifies remorse to such a degree that it petrifies spiritual progress. This is why Perseus uses Athena's shield to see Medusa's head through a reflection in order to behead her. If, in this moment, the higher golden truth of the Soul is remembered, then like Perseus with Athena's shield of wisdom, the image of self-distortion and guilt may be cut away with the sword of truth without giving up the Soul.

Perseus, armed with the head (Aries) of Medusa, now carries the power to petrify his enemies. Pallas-Athene places the head upon her breastplate and turns her enemies to stone. As Maier explains, "Wisdom or Naturall Philosophye renders its incredulous and envious condemners quite stupid and void of sense and understanding by the means of that same thinge, from whence Chrysaor was borne who was the father of Geryon who had three bodyes. That is by the means of the Lapiditick Gorgonian blood, which is nothing else but the Tincture of the Philosophick Stone." This is the stone that has the power to destroy through petrification or to liberate through wisdom.

SEPARATION

He shall await the sword of the Beloved and bare his throat for the stroke.

—ALEISTER CROWLEY

Perseus beheading Medusa is a violent, though necessary, act of separation. Alchemically, the head is associated with the Crown, Gold, and the Soul, and thus symbolizes the separation of the soul from the body. This is illustrated in the tenth plate of the *Splendor Solis* series, in which we see a man with a dark head and red body, wearing a white tunic and holding a

black sword in his right hand. A white corpse lies upon the earth at his feet, from which he has severed the golden head, now raised in his left hand. The limbs, symbolic of the four elements, have all been severed.

The swordsman explains: "I have slain you, that you might possess abundant life; but your head I will conceal. Lest worldly folk should find it and lay waste the earth, I will bury your body, that it may decay, increase, and bring forth innumerable fruits." Thus the Soul is retained, and the elements are left to decay in the *putrefactio*. The difference between the soul and the body is the same as that between the conscious and unconscious; neither can be fully understood until they are separated and purified and put back together. The putrefaction of the elements is this purification, from which the colors of the rainbow, or the "innumerable fruits," emerge. When the soul is reintroduced into the body, it is revived, resurrected, and exalted in a coherent spiritual wholeness.



Fig. 12.2. The separation of the golden head from the elemental body. From *Splendor Solis*, Germany, 1582, British Library, Harley 3469, folio 20v.

We find a clear parallel to the *Splendor Solis* separation in the visions of Zosimos, in which he sees a priest clad in white named "the Meridian of the Sun," and another man carrying a sword, who says "Cut off his head, immolate his body, and cut his flesh into pieces, that it may first be boiled according to the method, and then delivered to the place of punishments." The "Meridian of the Sun" alludes to the gold of the Sun and thus the head as the anatomical symbol of the Soul. Separation is a process of purification that allows us to differentiate between the subtle and the gross, the pure from the impure, the essential from the extraneous. The essence is separated

from the material body of the four elements, so that what is eternal (consciousness) is raised up above the material plane and understood in its own light.

The separation of the elements from the *prima materia* or the body is sometimes compared to a sword breaking open the philosopher's egg.

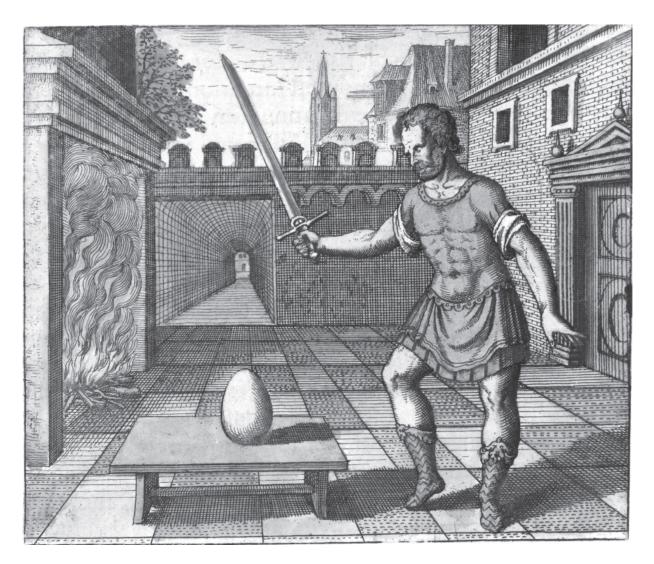


Fig.12.3. The sword of Mars cracks open the philosopher's egg.

From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens,* 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

We see this in Emblema 8 of *Atalanta Fugiens*, which is given the axiom, "Take an Egg and smite it with a fiery sword." Thus the *prima materia* with its mass of elemental confusion is broken open, allowing it to be penetrated and dissolved by the *argent vive*, the mercurial water that softens and prepares the bodies of the metals for transmutation. Maier describes it as a crocodile's egg that is destroyed with weapons of iron, while in the *Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar* Zosimos describes a dream in which he attempts to fight a dragon with an iron stick, but is blown back by the dragon's breath. He is then shown how the dragon can be defeated with water, a process that begins with squeezing the dragon to extract the egg of a crocodile. The egg is worked through a process resembling the digestion of food and divided into four parts, while the dragon is beheaded by the water. Finally, the dragon is decayed, purified, and its poisons extracted. The extracted of the dragon is decayed, purified, and its poisons extracted.

We are reminded in the Rosarium Philosophorum that the dragon itself is the argent vive, the "Permanent Water of the Philosophers, which is made after the putrefaction and separation of the elements, and the water otherwise is called Stinking Water." The putrefying waters of Scorpio and the dragon are also the waters of generation and conception. Water, argent vive, and the dragon are all symbols of Mercurius, who is the serpens mercurialis, 76 the divine spirit and the hermaphrodite, the ouroboros consuming itself in infinite cycles, the dismembered and resurrected god. The dragon and the egg are both synonymous with the alchemical vessel and with the *lapis* itself. Thus the vessel is both a sepulchre and a womb, for through the dismemberment, defeat, and disintegration of the dragon the procreative energies of the double-sexed dragon give birth to new creations. Zosimos advises us that a dragon guards the temple, which must be immolated, flayed of its skin, dismembered, with its flesh and bones separated, and then we will find what we seek. 78 It is the beginning and the end of the *magnum opus*.

MARS AND VENUS

When Hera gave birth to Hephaestus (Roman Vulcan), the god of fire and metalworking, she cast him down from heaven, ashamed of his lameness. He went on to become a skilled smith, and later crafted a golden throne as a cursed gift for Hera. When she took her seat upon it, she was bound fast to

it. Zeus, distressed for his wife, offered up his daughter Aphrodite in marriage to whichever god might succeed in retrieving Hephaestus. Aphrodite, in love with Ares and believing his skill as a warrior would secure his success, agreed to the arrangement. However, Ares was no match for the flaming metal that showered him when he approached Hephaestus. Next, Hephaestus was persuaded by Dionysus to return to Olympus of his own accord, release his mother, and take Aphrodite as his reward, setting the stage for the affair between Aphrodite (Venus) and Ares. Helios (Apollo), the sun god who sees all, witnessed the adulterous lovers and brought the news to Hephaestus. The fiery god became enraged and captured the lovers in a net made of fine bronze, putting them on display "entwined in their shame!" for the other Olympian gods to mock for their transgressions. "The gods were amused, and one of them murmured: 'If only I could be shamed like that!' Then all of them burst into laughter. This story went the rounds of the sky for a long time afterwards." Indeed, the punishment for their transgression is the very means by which the philosophical work is accomplished.

Despite their shameful adultery, Mars and Venus represent the quintessential polarity of the Lovers, and their affair has been the fascination of artists throughout the centuries. There is something inherently pure and eternal about the love between them that seems to transcend morality and inspire the human imagination. Perhaps it is the fact that the union between them speaks to our innermost being as the union or reconciliation between the opposing forces of the Soul: yin and yang, love and aggression, attraction and repulsion, the collective and the individual, the desire for union and the need for separation. These two forces are imprisoned together in the alchemical vessel, where by the application of intense heat they are digested to form the philospher's stone.

Both Mars (3) and Venus (9) share in the nature of the Sun, as their hieroglyphs demonstrate by the inclusion of the solar circle. John Dee's portrayal demonstrates that the point of the arrow in the glyph for Mars is actually the symbol for Aries, which of course is ruled by Mars and is the place of the Sun's exaltation. He does this to emphasize that fire is quintessential in our art.



Fig. 12.4. John Dee's glyph of Mars with the Fire of Aries. From Dee, John, and George Fabyan Collection. *Monas Hieroglyphica*, 1564.

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

Hence Dee advises us in his *Monas Hieroglyphica*: "Now regard the mystical character of Mars! Is it not formed from the hieroglyphs of the Sun and Aries, the magistery of the Elements partly intervening? And that of Venus—I wish to know is it not produced from that of the Sun and the Elements according to the best exponents? Therefore, the planets look towards the solar periphery and the work of revivification." As Dee alludes, the bull of Venus-ruled Taurus follows after the ram of Aries, in a time of fertility and new growth.

Jung compares Mars and Venus to Gabricus and Beya, who feature in the German poem concerning the union of the opposites in the *Rosarium Philosophorum*. This archetypal pair are alchemically referred to as the "white woman," *candida mulier*, who is Mercury, and the "red slave," *rubeus maritus*, or Sulfur, ⁸¹ and are usually portrayed as Luna and Sol. They are the white and red metals, or the white and red stones of the *opus*, or in the case of the *Rosarium*, the Body (Gabricus) and the Spirit (Beya), whose source lies in the *prima materia*. ⁸² From this union, or perfect conjunction within the self—the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage—is born an integrated spiritual consciousness as a child that transcends its progenitors. Their incestuous relationship as sister and brother indicates that they are from one and the same source, just as the human being is composed of forces expressed as male and female polarities, or the fiery

solar and watery lunar energies of the soul. Maier's Emblema 4 bears the axiom, "Join the Brother & the Sister & drink to 'em in the Bowl of Love." He explains that while they are of the same blood, they are vastly different in their temperaments, which lends to their fruitful union. Mars is hot, dry, and cholerick. Venus is cold, moist, and phlegmatick. To join like with like—fire with fire or water with water—would produce nothing. Mars and Venus, brother and sister, harmonize their opposing qualities to become perfected as Sol and Luna through the sacred marriage.

In the Vision of Arisleus, as recounted by Jung in *Psychology and* Alchemy, Arisleus visits the barren kingdom of the Rex marinus, the king under the sea. From the depths of the unconscious, the king's son calls out to be rescued: "Whosoever will free me from the waters and lead me to dry land, him will I prosper with everlasting riches."84 The restoration of the king, or the royal son, to his kingdom bestows upon the one who restores him "Health, the removall [sic] of diseases, the preservation of life free from the burden of things necessary, and the Horn of Plenty with Love and Honour." The king is advised by a philosopher that in order to bring prosperity and fruitfulness to his land, he must join his son and daughter, Gabricus (Thabritius) and Beya, who were born in his own brain. According to Jung, "the brother-sister pair stands for the unconscious or for some essential content," which must be retrieved or encountered in order to end sterility of the creative faculty. 86 Thus to answer the call of the king's son, the unknown aspect of the psyche that lies concealed in the unconscious, is the key to opening the flow of creativity.

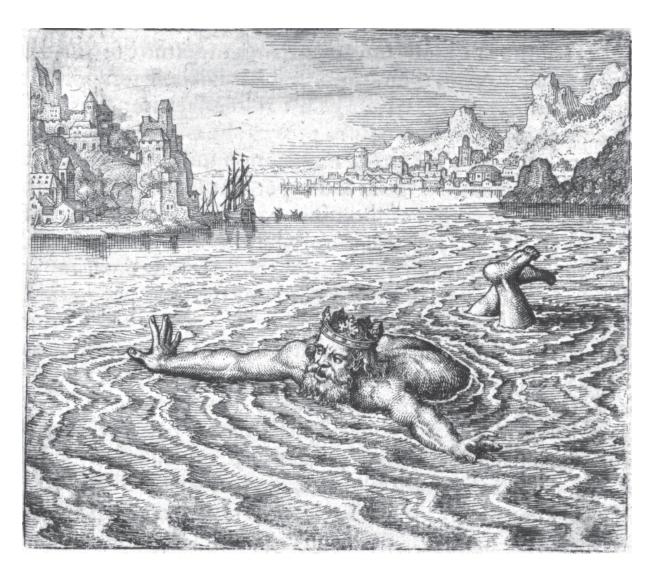


Fig. 12.5. The king dives into the sea of the unconscious. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

Maier calls this sea of the unconscious "the Erythræan or the Red Sea, subject to the Tropick of Cancer, in whose Bottom there lies the most abundant Quantity of Magnets. It is not safe for ships compacted of or laden with Iron to sail in it, for they may easily be drawn to the bottom by the Force of the Magnets."87 The attractive allure of the unconscious, if it overpowers the initial reluctance of the psyche to approach the horrifying abyss, poses the danger of psychological disintegration, the alchemical *separatio*. In the words of Jung, it is "the disintegration of personality into

its functional components, i.e., the separate functions of consciousness, the complexes, hereditary units, etc. Disintegration—which may be functional or occasionally a real schizophrenia."88 In Maier's version, the king's ship and all its men fall into the sea of magnets, but the king alone escapes by swimming, still wearing his Crown of "Glorious Rubies, by which he might be easily known and restored to his Kingdom."89 In the *Rosarium*, the disintegration takes the form of Gabricus swallowed up entirely in the womb of Beya, his body being atomically separated or dissolved into inseparable, or identical, parts in what Thomas Willard calls a "metaphorical orgasm."90

When the king is brought up from the sea, he must be made to sweat and purify through the use of sudorifics, heated by the fire and in hot baths. Upon this purification he is found a suitable match, and from their union a most desirable offspring will arise, "who shall excell all his Ancestors in Strength, Kingdom, Dominions, People, Riches and Wealth, and shall subdue his Enemyes not by War but Gentlenesse, not by Tyranny but Clemency, which is genuine and peculiar to Him." The war and the tyranny of Mars exert a magnetic pull on the psyche, drawing it into the depths of the unconscious and preventing the restoration of the kingdom, or the creative abundance of the Soul, until the inner experience is confronted and integrated. It is through the submersion into the unconscious waters, separation, purification, and union between the male and female that brings forth the transcendent childlike consciousness of the alchemist and the artist alike, allowing for the release and dissolution of creative blocks and liberating authentic expression.

Whereas Mars symbolizes separation and purification by fire and sweat, the re-conjunction and harmonization are the unifying function of Venus. As it is said in the *Rosarium* and repeated by many philosophers, the Dragon does not die lest he be slain by both the Brother and Sister—the hot and the cold, the dry and the moist, the male and the female, the choleric and phlegmatic, the hard and the soft, and the two polarities birthed from the king's own brain—that must work together in order to overcome the mercurial dragon, agent of chaos and dissolution. Through the series of alchemical processes of the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, they are exalted as Sol and Luna in the form of the winged hermaphrodite who stands upon the defeated dragon.

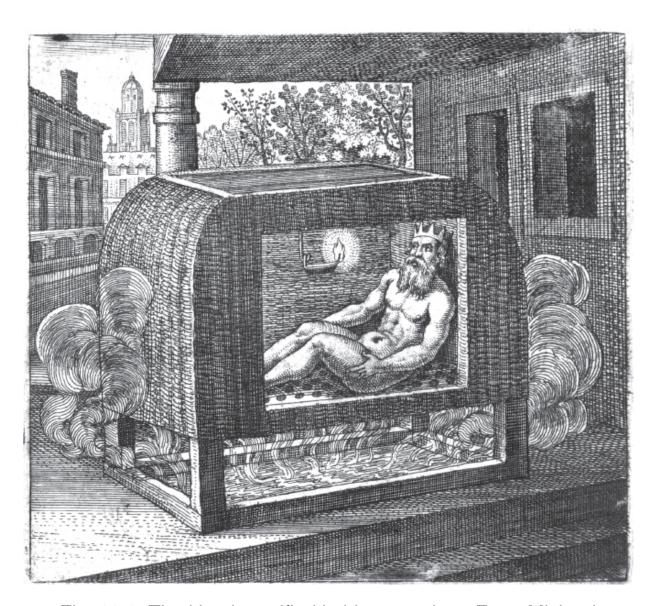


Fig. 12.6. The king is purified in his sweat box. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens,* 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.



Fig. 12.7. The Dragon must be killed by the brother and sister together to save the king from the sea.

From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

MAGNETISM AND THE WILL

The mathematician and natural philosopher Thales of Miletus (ca. 600 BCE), considered one of the Seven Sages and the first of the "Ionian physicists," is credited with being the first of the ancient Greeks to earnestly study the forces of attraction in nature. Living in the town of Miletus on the coast of modern-day Turkey, he studied samples of iron ore, also known as loadstone, from the proximal town of Magnesia. Our

"magnesia" is referred to in alchemical texts to mean those ironattracting stones displaying the properties of magnetism. Thales called them *ho magnetes lithos*, or "the Magnesian rock," and hence today we call them *magnets*. ⁹³ The stone of Thales is likely to have been marcasite, or white iron pyrite, a stone like hematite.

The fact that magnetism can be transferred from one substance to another, such as when steel is stroked by magnetic iron ore and becomes magnetic in turn, ⁹⁴ speaks to the susceptibility of a weak will to a stronger will by the forces of influence. However this property of ferromagnetism, such as is seen in steel, does not apply to all materials, despite the fact that all materials do display the property of magnetic forces. Pure copper and pure aluminum are examples of materials that do not become magnetized by the stroking of iron ore, because the magnetic alignment "cannot be imposed from outside unless the substance itself cooperates." This is an indication of the kind of will we want to develop. Since copper is a metal of the heart, and copper itself cannot be made to move to the will of another unless it wants to, it could be said that "following your heart" is an essential aspect of guiding the compass of your will toward its true north.

Magnetized iron in the shape of a horseshoe may be used, according to tradition, to attract luck or to repel evil. Attraction and repulsion are forces existing within all matter and may be directed by the will, but one must first have the will—that is, the iron, or Mars and activation of *Manipura*—of the leonine, outward-seeking drive and masculine force. Until we have purified our Iron into its Philosophical state, our will is weak and malleable, easily influenced by others. It behooves us then to use our magnetic horseshoes wisely to repel external influences, creating time and space to strengthen the will, purify it, and bring it into alignment with Divine Will.

While the world keeps spinning in perpetual flux, we turn inward to find stillness. When we align our magnetic particles in one direction, the magnetic force of our being is amplified, meaning both our attractive and repulsive forces are stronger. The positive and negative poles of our magnet are the crown (*Sahasrara*) and root (*Muladhara*), which align with the vertical pillar of consciousness and Divine Will, the caduceus. Around this central channel the positive (*pingala*) and negative (*ida*) polarities, symbolized by serpents (or dragons) are harmoniously unified in their ascent. When one is fully grounded in the body and the energies of the

spheres have been de-energized, the charge from above has the ability to sustain itself, charging the entire system with courage, purpose, and vitality while steadying the flame of creative passion.



The Sun The Essence of Eternity



The Sun is the greatest god of the gods in heaven, for whom all heavenly gods give way as to a king and master.

—HERMES, FROM SALAMAN, THE WAY OF HERMES

WITHIN THE BRILLIANT WHITE LIGHT OF THE SUN, all of the rays are One, for the Sun is the materialized form of the Supreme One that rests beyond the realms of Intellect and Soul. The Sun is the alchemical Sol, or Soul, corresponding with Sulfur and the oil, or essence, that is part of everything within the cosmos. It is the perfection and indestructibility of gold and the highest attainable perfection of humanity. In daily rotations and yearly cycles the Sun symbolizes birth, life, death, resurrection, and immortality, eternally renewing itself. Cultures around the globe have exalted the Sun in their pantheons in male and female gods alike. All the planets are unified by the Sun; with the reins of "Life, and Soul, and Spirit, Deathlessness, and Genesis," the Sun is a charioteer, driving the seven Rulers like a team of celestial horses, maintaining the cosmic order (*CH* 16.7).\(^1\)

Astrologically, the Sun rules the head and right eye, ribs, heart, respiratory system, the sense organs, sensory motion, and the tendons.² Albertus Magnus asserts the Sun's ruling the right eye of man and the left eye of woman, describing the Sun's nature as moderately hot and dry and of good fortune, with governance over the brain, marrow, and sinews.³ The Sun rules over Sunday, from the Old English sunnandæg or "day of the sun," and over the crown chakra, Sahasrara, at the top of the head. In the zodiac, the Sun has domicile in the fifth sign of Leo, the lion. In the northern hemisphere Leo falls when the Sun is at its greatest power, embodying qualities of strength, authority, independence, and confidence. As a fixed fire sign, its nature is maintaining momentum in a given direction, or harnessing energy required to change directions. As the Sun is king of gods and king of metals, the lion is king of beasts, regal, fierce, and just. To the Egyptians, the lion symbolized intrepidity; its round face and hairs were likened to the rays of the Sun, and its forearms denoted strength.4

The energy and heat of the Sun allow life to flourish, and as Earth orbits around it we experience seasons. Weather patterns and ocean currents are driven by interactions between the Earth and Sun, and charged particles from the Sun hitting Earth's magnetic fields causes the aurorae. The Sun has been revered by humans throughout the ages and across cultures for its life-giving powers and its destructive potential. In India and Egypt, the Sun's brutalizing heat is perceived as a deadly and devouring force, while the Moon is the source of life and conductor of nourishing waters. According to Plutarch, Egyptians associated the destructive god Typhon (Set) with the solar world on account of the Sun's potential for destruction through unrelenting fire, contrasted with lunar powers of gentle moistening and fructification, which he assigned to Osiris. 5 Sekhmet (also Sekhet), from the root sekhem, meaning "to be strong, mighty, violent," was the Egyptian lion-headed goddess personifying the destructive power of the Sun's scorching rays. 6 For the Hindus the Sun's searing heat was identified with Garuda, a celestial sky creature that endlessly attacks, with its drying and scorching effects, the life-giving waters of the Earth. Both the drying heat of the Sun and nourishing waters are necessary for generation. While it is in the darkness of the womb of Earth that life begins, the Sun coaxes it from the shadows, catalyzing its growth and unfolding. The Sun's authority and life-giving/sustaining powers are the reason "the Sun is the preserver and the nurse of every class" $(CH\ 16.12)$.⁷

Often the Sun is represented by various deities within a given culture, aligning with its varying qualities at sunrise, midday, sunset, and even at night. In Egypt the rising Sun was Khepri, a great scarab that rolls the Sun like a ball of dung filled with the beetle's eggs and new life. The midday Sun at its Zenith was Rā (also Re or Phra), meaning "Sun," the "father of the gods." As setting Sun he was Atum, the aged and bearded old man. Khnum, the ram-headed god, was another form of the evening Sun. The Sun-god Rā was known as Auf-Rā or Auf, meaning "flesh" or "corpse," when he set below the horizon and began his journey through the twelve hours of darkness in the Mesektet-boat or night-barque.

In Egypt the Sun took many forms, including the Sun-disk Aten, and Atum, a predynastic Sun deity and god of Heliopolis, whose name means "complete one" and who created himself out of the primordial waters of Nun. Amon, the "hidden god" of the Hermopolitan Ogdoad, became solarized as Amon-Ra in the Twelfth Dynasty, becoming a prominent national god. Ra was often depicted as a falcon-headed man crowned with the Sun disk and uraeus. In combination with Ra, the sky falcon Horus was called Ra-Harakhte and represented as the youthful winged Sun disk. The Sun and Moon are the right and left eye of Horus, or the right and left eye of heaven. Ra was called "Lord of the Sky, the Sovereign who made the gods," is rising like the phoenix, or bennu bird, to land upon the Benben stone ("pyramidion"), a pyramidal stone surmounted on an obelisk symbolizing a solar ray.

In Greece the Sun god was Helios, son of the Titans Hyperion and Theia, and brother to Selene (Moon) and Eos (Dawn). Sometimes called Phoebus, Ovid describes the god sitting upon an emerald throne in a lofty golden and bronze palace with towering columns, adorned with ivory figures, with silvery doors upon which the twelve signs of the zodiac are pictured in relief. His Roman counterpart is Sol. Rhode (Rhodos), bride of the Sun, is a personification of the island of Rhodes, a prominent center of worship for Helios, famed for the Colossus of Rhodes, a massive statue of Helios that reached 70 cubits (105 feet) in height.

Apollo, also called Phoebus and sometimes conflated with Helios, is the brother of Artemis and son of Leto (Latona) and Zeus. The birth of Apollo took place beneath a palm tree on the island of Delos and was attended by a cock, an animal sacred to both Apollo and Helios. Upon his birth Delos blossomed with gold.²¹ Apollo is he "who shoots afar,"²² god of the lyre and curved silver bow, of art, music, medicine, and prophecy.²³ In the *Homeric Hymns* Apollo asserts that he proclaims the will of Zeus, and like Helios and Ra, Apollo punishes the wicked.²⁴

The sovereign Sun sees everything, shining its rays upon gods and humanity alike, dispelling shadows and revealing truth wherever it gazes. The Babylonian sun god is Šamaš (Sumerian Utu), the god of justice who watches over the affairs of humanity, giving special attention to the underprivileged. He is merciful, all-seeing, all-knowing; a warrior and destroyer of wrongdoers, rewarding the good and just. His symbols are the solar disk, winged disk, and cross. 25 Throughout Mesopotamian mythology Šamaš served as a counsel and aid to humans and gods, ²⁶ regulated the seasons, and revived all life upon opening the eastern gates of heaven at dawn.²⁷ Šamaš is the god of morality, truth, omens, and extispicy (divination through animal entrails).²⁸ The Sun god emerges at dawn from the "mountain of the east," descending at dusk to the "mountain of the west."²⁹ In the Babylonian mythology of Šamaš, he opens the door of heaven in the west at sunset, journeys through the "interior of heaven," or underworld, and acts as judge of the dead, then retires to his chamber. In the morning he rises and opens the door of heaven in the east. $\frac{30}{2}$

Soaring through the heavens, the Sun is associated with a variety of birds of light, from the white swan to the golden eagle, the falcon, and the phoenix. The eagle is capable of ascending to the heights of heaven and symbolizes ascension of the soul toward the Supreme, as in the flight of the Sumerian shepherd king, Etana. On the advice of Utu, Etana rescues an eagle from a pit and rides him to heaven to find "the plant of giving birth." In this case it is only by reaching the heavenly sphere that the king creates new life (and an heir) in his kingdom. According to Jung, the swan, eagle, and phoenix are alchemical symbols that "signify the Sun and thus the philosophical gold." The singing swan rises triumphant from the waters of the unconscious, a symbol of rebirth, like the phoenix.

Yet the solar bird is preceded by the venomous, cold-blooded, and scaled earth-dweller. In the process of evolution, both physical and spiritual, the serpentine cycles of life, death, and rebirth are perfected through the art of nature, transmuted into golden wings rising to the land of the immortals. The serpent and solar bird are equally matched, and the balance of the universal forces is maintained through their eternal opposition. In the case of Apollo slaughtering the dragon Python who guarded the oracle at Delphi, the defeat of the serpent facilitates the prophetic powers of the Sun god. 33 Ra's primary enemy was the giant serpent Apep, or Apophis, who made daily attempts to interfere with the movement of Ra's solar barque. This quintessential battle of opposites is represented by the serpent and eagle in a Mesopotamian myth, wherein Utu acts as counselor to the serpent in the defeat of the eagle. 34

THE EYE OF THE SUN

In most cultures the Sun is a god or an aspect of the godhead, considered the son or eye of the Supreme Deity. This is the all-seeing eye of the Soul by which the Sun is cognizant of all secrets. For the Greeks the Sun was the "eye of Jupiter," and for the Parsis the eye of Ahura Mazda. At a basic level, the visible Sun's relationship with the eye is captured by Plotinus, who writes that "The Sun, cause of the existence of sense-things and of their being seen, is indirectly the cause of sight." Yet on a more arcane level, the true Sun illuminates the inner eye allowing us to see beyond the sense world and into the true nature of reality. In the descent of the soul according to Macrobius, the Sun is the fourth sphere where the soul develops the faculties of sense-perception and imagination. 37

The ancient nomads of Egypt visualized the Sun as a falcon soaring through the sky, becoming the right eye of Horus, the falcon god, and later, the "eye of Ra." Macrobius asserts Osiris is the Sun, for in hieroglyphs the Egyptians represented him as an eye in a scepter, like the allseeing eye in the sky, keeping watch over the cosmos. When depicted as an eye above a throne the name *Osiris* means "place of the eye." In one version of the Egyptian creation myths, a lotus blossomed open from the primordial waters, revealing a scarab beetle symbolizing the Sun. The scarab transformed into a boy from whose tears mankind emerged. The child in the

lotus was Ra, who created all things, and sometimes the lotus was called the Eye of Ra. $\frac{41}{}$

The eye was a symbol of the Great Goddess, whose destructive side was expressed through the terrible heat of the Sun and equated with anger and fury. The lion goddess Sekhmet was called the "eye of Ra" in many texts, and usually shown in art wearing the solar disk and uraeus upon her crown. Known as *Nesert*, meaning "flame," she functioned as protector of good while vanquishing evil.⁴² The eye was also seen as a flame and associated with the royal cobra, or uraeus, rearing its head and spitting flames. When placed upon the forehead, it became the protector of the crown.⁴³ The uraeus was identified with the goddess Wadjet, who took the snake's form on the brow of the king.⁴⁴ Thus the wedjat-eye (or *utchat-eye*), also called the Eye of Horus, represented the Sun or Ra, while the left eye represented the Moon, or wedjat of Thoth. The wedjat-eye was used as a protective amulet to ward off evil.⁴⁵

Esoterically the Sun rules the crown chakra, called Sahasrara, the seventh chakra at the top of the head, which vibrates to the color violet or pure white. Symbolized by a thousand-petaled lotus, the crown chakra is the center of truth, the higher self, divine knowing, cosmic consciousness, and our sense of connection and identity within the universe. It is associated with the cerebrum, central nervous system, and the diencephalon where the pineal gland, pituitary gland, and hypothalamus (the "master gland") are found. These glands work together to produce and release hormones, which circulate throughout the endocrine system and body, affecting our emotions, energy levels, cognition, and many other bodily functions. Just as the crown has a regulatory function over the other chakras, the pituitary, pineal, and hypothalamus work synergistically to regulate homeostasis and hormone production throughout the body. The winged Sun-disk symbol assigned to Horus and various other solar deities parallel the winged sphere crowning the caduceus and refer to this area of the brain. As such, activation of the pineal gland, pituitary gland, and hypothalamus is key to sovereignty and mastery of the entire energy body. The glyph of the Eye of Horus (see figure 13.1) is often interpreted as an anatomical cross section of this part of the brain, located in the limbic system, sometimes called the "feeling" or "emotional" brain. Interestingly, it is written in spell 316 of the Coffin Texts:

Behold it (the Eye) will be stronger than all the gods, It has mastered the dwellers at the ends of the Earth, it is sovereign over every god. $\frac{46}{}$

The thalamus, from the Greek *thalamus*, meaning "inner chamber, bedroom," is one of the structures encompassed by the limbic system, along with the subthalamus, hypothalamus, and epithalamus. This area is the "bridal chamber" where Sun and Moon are united in the *hieros gamos*, being the conscious, rational, thinking mind and the unconscious, irrational, feeling mind. Unifying the opposites, one awakens the true Self and becomes conscious of the Essential Being, capable of seeing through the veil. The practice of hatha yoga is a means of unifying the Sun and Moon, as is shown in the meaning of the Sanskrit *hatha*, from ha = Sun and tha = Moon. Dennis William Hauck writes that this union produces the "feeling intellect." This refinement leads to "perfect intuition," or what the Egyptians called "Intelligence of the Heart."

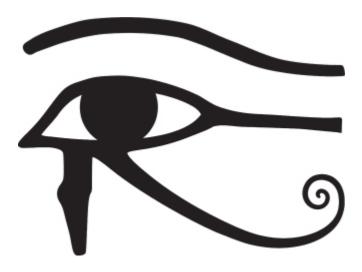


Fig. 13.1. The Eye of Horus.

By Jeff Dahl. GNU Free Documentation License.

This region of the brain is called the Crystal Palace in Taoist practices intended to stimulate and awaken this center and activate enlightenment, for all of these glands are highly sensitive to light. The pineal gland is bathed in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) produced in the ventricles, a clear, colorless

fluid circulating primarily through the brain and spinal column (the central nervous system) in rhythmic, wavelike motion between cranium and sacrum, surrounding and cushioning the brain. Dr. Randolph Stone, the founder of a hands-on healing modality called Polarity Therapy, conceived of the CSF as the "Sea of Life Essence," conveying "ultrasonic and light energies," or the energies of the Mind throughout the body. Flowing through the central nervous system, the neuter pole of the *sushumna* nadi, the CSF is "water that does not wet the hands," the philosophical Mercury, the *aqua vitae*, the messenger of the gods. It flows between Above and Below facilitating the entire nervous system that retrieves information picked up by our five senses, transmitting motor signals throughout the body. It is the most conductive fluid in the body, transporting electrolytes and high concentrations of neuropeptide messenger molecules. These neuropeptides influence cellular health, respiration, digestion, elimination, and mental-emotional health.

CSF appears in high concentrations around the pineal gland, which has a higher concentration of blood per cubic volume than any other organ. 51 Considering this, let us continue reading the Coffin Text quoted above:

Behold me, O Men and Gods! that is how I became the burning Eye of Horus . . . the Flood, the parent of the gods, it was that clothed me, creating therefrom the eye for his body. 52

The Eye originates in the Primordial Ocean—the CSF, the "Father of the gods." At the intersection of cosmogony, myth, anatomy, and art, the Eye of Horus demonstrates a profound alchemical knowledge of the relationship between consciousness and matter, creation and destruction, life, death, rebirth, and resurrection as experienced through the mortal frame.

In craniosacral therapy, the connection between the sacrum and the occiput is of key importance in balancing and regulation of cerebrospinal flow. Interestingly, an important symbol associated with Osiris was *the Tet*, which represented the sacrum of Osiris, and with its proximity to the sperm duct, the seed of Osiris. It was often made into an amulet and paired with the amulet of Isis, the "buckle" as it is sometimes called, which Budge

argues represents the sexual organ and menstrual blood of Isis. Thus the generative powers of both man and woman would accompany the deceased into the other world. Semen and blood parallel the white and red tinctures of the alchemical *opus*, and tantric sexual alchemy focuses on the retention of the semen and redirecting of the sexual energy up the spinal column to the "bridal chamber."

The death and dismemberment of Osiris is the descent of male solar consciousness into the darkness of the unconscious, down the spinal column to the sacrum; as depicted in the twelfth woodcut of the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, a winged Sun descends into a mercurial bath. The caption reads: "Here Sol plainly dies again, and is drowned with the Mercury of the Philosophers." The philosophical Mercury is symbolized by dragons and serpents. The relationship between the Sun god and the serpent points to the relationship of the initiate to powerful forces of the depths. The serpent is synonymous with *kundalini* curled up in the sacrum, and the dragon's dual nature, sometimes fiery and sometimes watery, correlates with the twin serpents of the staff of Hermes. From the sacrum, the *kundalini* rises up from the depths reaching the seat of consciousness in the pineal.



Fig. 13.2. The winged Sun disk descending into the Mercurial bath.

From the Rosarium Philosophorum, woodcut 12.

Through the stilling of the mind, the thalamic region of the brain is activated. The Latin word thalamus refers botanically to "the receptacle of a flower." Through attention and receptivity to the light of the Sun, awareness blossoms. The story of Helios and Clytië, as told by Ovid, describes her transformation into a heliotrope flower. Clytië loved Helios, but Helios scorned Clytië. Disconsolate, she lost her mind and sat upon the ground, turning her face sadly toward the Sun in its course, slowly transforming into a heliotrope. $\frac{56}{100}$ This solar plant, heliotropium, from helios, "sun," and tropos, "a turn, change," faces ever toward the Sun, like the sunflower. Hence the heliotrope symbolizes the soul in devotion to the light, or the lover to the beloved. 57 Just as the heliotrope follows the Sun, the receptive mind is like a flower, petals open chalices, catching through naught but natural movements the emanations of the One and the Good that descend through solar rays. This indicates a state of mind grown beyond seeking, emptied of all preconceptions and wherein polarities have been unified, and subject and object have become synonymous and inseparable. True gnosis is experience, which no amount of mental effort can grasp or attain, for it occurs in the effortless motion of the soul, turning gently and faithfully toward the Good.

Mead compares the mind of most people to an unripe plant; the "blossoming" is "achieved only by Heat from the Sun." By heat the flowering takes place, and the powers of regeneration, as symbolized by the eternal cycles of the Sun, are attained within the individual. Through the divine drunken madness of Dionysus, god of the vine and lord of vegetation, the flower grows and the fruit is harvested, with the heat of the soul, fire of the mind, and flame of desire all burning together in ecstatic union.

CEASELESS EMANATIONS

In *The Definitions of Asclepius Unto King Ammon*, Asclepius explains that the Sun is the demiurge that orders heaven and earth, "pouring down Essence, and taking Matter up, drawing both round Himself and to Himself all things, and from Himself giving all things to all" (*CH* 16.5–6).⁵⁹ The

ineffable unnameable Source emanates limitless Good through the rays of the Sun, which disseminates throughout the Intelligible and Sensible Worlds and unto Earth and "the lowest Depth and the Abyss" (*CH* 16.5–6). Through gnosis the Soul within a human being is unified with the Good that streams forth through the Sun's light. Our visible Sun is the head of the Supreme, who is "wreathed with the Cosmos" and wears a crown of solar rays.

Around the Sun are eight spheres—the sphere of the fixed stars, the six other planets, and one "Circumterrene," or earthly sphere (*CH* 16.17). Daimons, or spiritual powers, their essence being activity, act upon humans according to planetary rulers and fate determined by the zodiacal wheel. However, recall the two parts of the human soul—one rational and beyond the fate sphere, the other irrational and enslaved by the daimons. There is a conscious part of the soul, and an unconscious part; whatever we are unconscious of drives us without our awareness. Like the Sun as a charioteer, we must harness the mind (the reins), so the Self is "of steeds the ruler, and of life the light." In the story of Phaëthon, son of Helios, we see a clear example of the kind of destruction occurring when the steeds are not controlled.

Entering dark caverns of the mines, we bring unconscious drives like ores to the surface and begin the alchemical work of transmutation, ultimately refining them to reach the perfection of alchemical Gold. Through the Great Work, the soul becomes increasingly more liberated and conscious of its own mechanisms, ascending beyond the daimonal influences (the Harmony):

Who then doth have a Ray shining upon him through the Sun within his rational part—and these in all are few—on them the daimons do not act; for no one of the daimons or of Gods has any power against one Ray of God.

As for the rest, they are all led and driven, soul and body, by the daimons loving and hating the activities of these. $(CH 16.16)^{63}$

Like the Sun, the emanations from the One radiate outward limitlessly, yet the brilliance of the Source is never diminished. Adonis, sometimes

called the Sun or the son of Sol and likened with Dionysus and Osiris, is torn apart and destroyed by the boar of winter, yet his essential nature remains untouched, for he is revived by the Mother. Sol's incorruptibility is evinced in the following passage in the Upanishads: "As the Sun, revealer of all objects to the seer, is not harmed by the sinful eye, nor by the impurities of the objects it gazes on, so the one Self, dwelling in all, is not touched by the evils of the world. For he transcends all." Plotinus likened the emanations of the Sun to the self-emanations of the One, which both maintain their "self-sameness" while ceaselessly radiating outward. 65

This incorruptible state, which all souls are capable of attaining through the power of transmutation, evades most minds, stumbling in drunken stupor. In contrast, by sobering the Mind, the Soul becomes drunk with the Divine, partaking of deathless nature. Drunken revelry of the Bacchanalian and Dionysian mysteries is ecstatic union with the Divine through identification with both the dismembered god and the Sun. In one fragment of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, it is written: "The soul of men shall press God closely to itself, with naught subject to death in it; [but now] it is all drunk, for it doth glory in the Harmony [that is, the sublunary or fate spheres] beneath whose sway the mortal frame exists." Such a state of separation is lamented in the invocation of Helios in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (1.195–22): "I call upon you, lord of the universe, in an hour of need; hear me, for my soul is [distressed], and I am perplexed and in want of [everything. Wherefore, come] to me, you who are lord over all angels; shield me against all excess of magical power of aerial daimon [and] fate."

THE GOLDEN ROSE AND THE DIVINE CHILD

In Qabalah the Sun radiates in *Tiphareth*, the sephirah of "Beauty," whose vice is pride and virtue is "devotion to the Great Work" that unites and balances the entire Tree. Knight writes that Tiphareth "confers the Vision of the Harmony of Things and an understanding of the Mysteries of the Crucifixion," for it is the sephirah of "all the Redeemer Gods" including Christ. 68 Its symbolism is the cross, and in particular, the Rose Cross that unites the Spirit with the Cross of Matter. Crowley, in describing the tau and the circle as a form of the Rosy Cross, says they are the union of subject

and object, which is the goal of the *magnum opus* and likewise symbolized by the ankh (*crux ansata*), the lingam-yoni, and the alchemical marriage. ⁶⁹

Tiphareth lines up in the human esoteric frame with the heart chakra, while the crown, *Sahasrara*, aligns with or below Kether. Tiphareth bears the Qabalistic title of "Lesser Countenance" (*Zoar Anpin*), or Microprosopus, while Kether is the "Vast Countenance" (*Arik Anpin*), or Macroprosopus. Macroprosopus emanates the Supernal Father (ABBA) and Supernal Mother (AIMA), and from their union is born the Microprosopus, or *filius philosophorum*, which is Tiphareth as the central hub of the emotional sephiroth (Chesed, Geburah, Tiphareth, Netzach, Hod, Yesod). We can conceive then of a solar power in higher and lower expressions in the body, one in proximity to the heart, and the other as the thousand-rayed Sun radiating like the thousand-petaled lotus of *Sahasrara*. The birth of the son—the redeemer, Christ consciousness—is dependent from the self-generating potential of "the Ancient of Days" (Kether).

The unification symbolized by the Rose Cross represents a carefree, receptive, and consciously unconscious attitude toward life in which the flow of intuition is uninhibited by bodily constrictions and fears. To be consciously unconscious results from the *hieros gamos*, in which the visible and sensible world is infused and integrated with the dreamlike, irrational elements of the unconscious. Actions align with the highest level of awareness residing in the crown and resonate through the heart. This is the *rubedo* stage of the *opus*, the fixation of truth within the Body, Mind, and Soul.

This union is paralleled in the symbology of the number six, attributed to Tiphareth and to the Sun, a number of harmony and perfection reflected geometrically in the shape of the hexagram. Hexagonal structures are found in the growth of inorganic nature, like crystals, honeycombs, and the universe itself. The six-pointed star (🌣), symbol of the Macrocosm, also known as the Jewish Star of David, represents a complete unification of polar principles of expansion and contraction by the union of two triangles, one pointed to heaven and the other pointed to earth. It is the symbol for the heart chakra, representing the divine union of yang and yin, male and female, fire and water, active and passive, heaven and earth, spirit and matter, impulse and reaction. The key to the six-pointed star lies in its center, the seventh point, which is the Sun.

In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the purity, protection, and preservation of the heart was of utmost importance. It was considered to be equal to the mind, the organ of both intellect and the emotions, for the world is created by the heart and tongue of Ptah, or the intellect and logos. Large scarab amulets were placed into the breast of the deceased, either in place of or with the heart. They were anointed with myrrh and the text of chapter 30B from the Book of the Dead was spoken over them, preventing the heart of the deceased from opposing them in the God's domain where the heart was weighed on the scales of truth (Ma'at). The protection of the deceased from opposing them in the God's domain where

The scarabaeus, or scarab beetle, was associated with Khepri, the scarab-headed god of the morning Sun. It was a solar symbol of new life, regeneration, and fertility in ancient Egypt. Rolling its ball of dung like the solar orb rolling through its various stations in the heavens, the scarab vivifies the world, and like the Sun's resurrection from the depths of night, it is reborn from its own putrefaction. According to Manly P. Hall, the scarab's egg is an analogy for the seed of the metals, and the habits of the beetle mirror the diverse processes required in transmuting base metals into gold. Within the spiral hieroglyph of alchemy (see figure 13.3), the seed proceeds through each planetary sphere to reach its perfection at the center, the Sun, and then returns to the unifying source. Within this spiral the Sun is encountered twice—once as the lower Sun between Mars and Venus, and as the central Sun, from where we flip directions. Having reached the consummation of the inward involutionary journey, we spiral outward in an evolutionary movement back to Source.

In the evolution of the Soul there is the progression from child, to adult, to the resurrected body, which parallels the birth, exaltation, and crucifixion of the Christ, and alchemically the transmutation of the stone. In Jungian terms it is the process of individuation, represented by the mandala or the rose, which draws consciousness toward its center while radiating and expanding outward, just as the individual undergoes a process of expansion and contraction. A solar-rose mandala figures in Crowley's version of the nineteenth arcanum (illustrated by Lady Frieda Harris), the Sun, beneath which twin children with butterfly wings, male and female, dance naked in the light. The rose in this card is the full realization of solar consciousness unfolding in resplendent beauty, while the twin children symbolize uninhibited surrender to the flow of intuition, complete freedom, and

shameless innocence. The *lapis philosophorum* became identified with the Divine Child in the first century after Christ in the work of Comarius, who writes that "the art imitates child[birth], since it is also formed like a child, and when it is completed in every way, you will behold the sealed mystery." Von Franz explains that the unconscious, before it becomes known, is the "father." Through making the unconscious conscious, it becomes the "son" born within the alchemist, imparting to them a childlike and eternal vitality. Thus, like the newborn king, we receive the three gifts of the magi: gold, frankincense, and myrrh—the Soul, Mind, and Body of the Sun. As we are told in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (11.15), "The human is an image of the Sun." According to Blavatsky, "first-born" is a title given to one just initiated, and an adept that has received the Word is called a "Son of God." Rod."

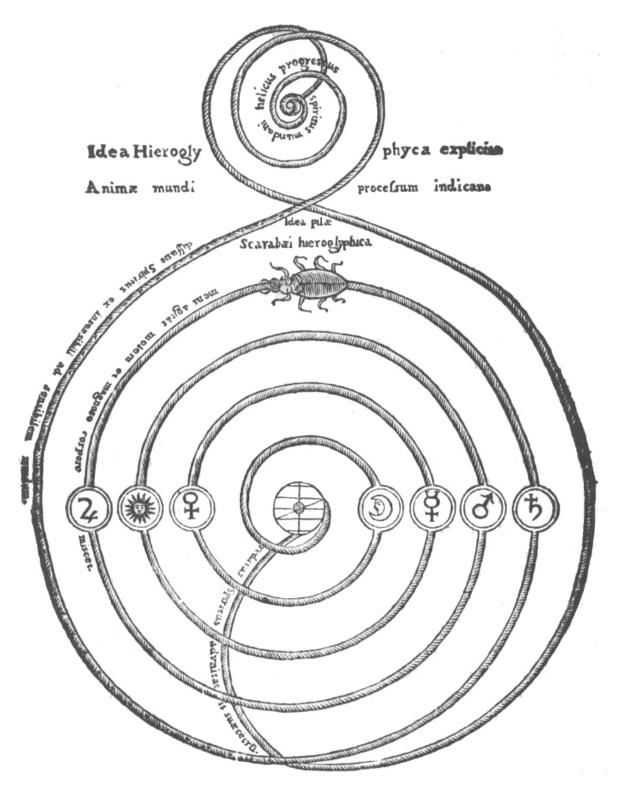


Fig. 13.3. The spiraling path of the scarab through the seven spheres.

From Athanasius Kircher, Oedipus Aegyptiacus, 1650.

RESURRECTION

The phoenix builds itself a nest and sets it aflame, to be calcined to ashes and born anew. Its symbolism is closely related to stories of the death and resurrection of Osiris, Mithras, Tammuz, and Christ, Sun gods representing cycles of death and renewal. Pliny's account of the phoenix states that "in Arabia he is sacred to the Sun: that he liveth 660 Years: and when he groweth old, he builds a Nest with the Twigs of Cassia (Cinnamon) and Frankincense Trees: and when he hath filled it with Spices, he dieth upon it." According to Herodotus, the phoenix would fly carrying the body (or ashes) of his father encased within a hollowed-out egg of myrrh, elivering the egg to the temple of the Sun in Heliopolis. By its regeneration the phoenix symbolized the daily death and rebirth of the Sun and the annual flooding of the Nile. 82

R. T. Rundle Clark calls the phoenix the most persuasive symbol of the Egyptians, and asserts that the description of Herodotus is a misunderstanding of Egyptian religion. Rather, the Egyptians saw the phoenix as the harbinger of a new age, carrying light and life from the Isle of Fire, a place of eternal life from which the gods are born. The Egyptians associated the phoenix with the purple heron, called the bennu bird. Osiris, called "the mysterious phoenix" and "Lord of Eternity," was depicted as a mummy with the head of a phoenix, or bennu, symbolizing the renewal and indefinite prolongation of existence.

The word *phoenix* is related to the Greek *phoinix*, meaning "purple" or "crimson," and to the name of the ancient civilization of Phoenicia, which means "purple country." *87*Phoinix* has also been used to mean "date-palm" or "palm," and Ovid recounts that the bird's nest is built in the tops of a quivering palm. *88* Christian tableaus on sarcophagi and apsidal mosaics also commonly picture a phoenix and palm. *89* On Palm Sunday fresh palm leaves are customarily used in ceremonies as a reenactment of how Jesus was greeted upon his arrival into Jerusalem. The Liturgical colors of this day are white and red, representing the sacrifice and blood of Christ and corresponding to the alchemical *albedo* and *rubedo*, or Luna and Sol. It is

also said the birth of Apollo took place beneath a palm tree. Horapollo ascribed astronomical or astrological symbolism to the palm and phoenix. Each new moon the palm grows a new branch, thus a branch represents one month and with the growth of twelve branches, the year. The phoenix, on the other hand, symbolizes the *magnus annus*, or great cyclical renovation of longer celestial cycles. By the phoenix was also implied an inundation, or a soul who has been continuing for a long time, by association with the bird's long life and solar symbolism. 92

Like the Sun itself, the red-and gold-plumed bird of resurrection is often portrayed as a symbol for the *rubedo* (reddening). The final reddening that takes place in the work, also known by the Greek word *iosis*, is sometimes described as being violet or purple in color, just as the phoenix is sometimes described variously as red, gold, and purple. In spiritual alchemy the *rubedo* is when the philosopher's stone is realized and the alchemist is freed from the physical body by recognizing immortal consciousness to be the core of their being. The phoenix is thus pictured at the top of Andreas Libavius's monumental layered diagram, "The Philosopher's Stone," in his 1606 *Alchymia* (pictured below), where the heavenly marriage of opposites transpires at the sphere of the phoenix, signifying the completion of the Great Work. The Taoist's called it the "cinnabar bird" (*tan-niao*), relating to the red sulfur of mercury.

The Book of the Dead is filled with hymns and litanies to Rā and Osiris, who are identified or even synonymous with one another. In the "Hymn and Litany to Osiris," Osiris is exalted as the "victorious one, ruler of the world in thy gracious seasons . . . lord of the celestial world." In the "Litany of Rā" (2.2) it is stated clearly "the royal Osiris is Rā himself." That the dying and resurrected god and the Sun are commensurate is not surprising; it is the natural unification of opposing principles—the inviolable Sun in daily course and his earthly, dismembered counterpart. It should be emphasized, however, that the deceased, who is identified as Osiris-Ani, is invoking in themselves the Supreme Power and immortality of the Sun, thus merging them into a dual-formed Rā-Osiris. As Eliade explains, "the identification of the two gods takes place in the person of the dead pharaoh; after the process of Osirification, the king revives as the young Re [Rā]." This represents an "Osirification" of Rā and a solarization of Osiris, such that the murdered god was made triumphant, and the solar god was made

accessible to humanity. Just as the Sun journeys through the heavens in eternal cycles of life, death, and rebirth, the deceased descends into the underworld in death, and is then resurrected.

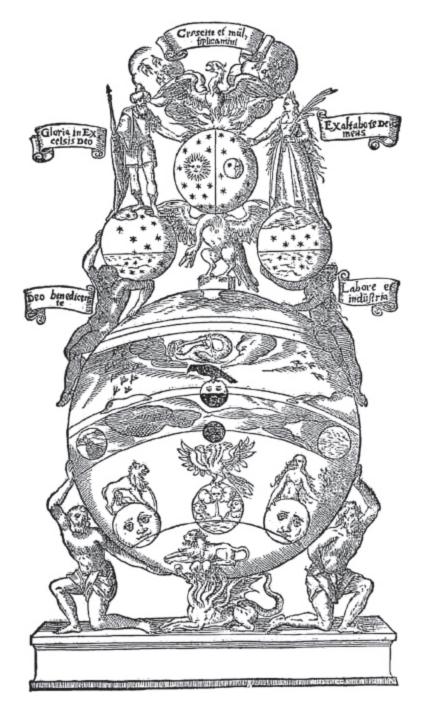


Fig. 13.4. The phoenix at the summit of the alchemical *opus*. From Andreas Libavius, *Alchymia*, Frankfurt, 1606.

We are told in the Rosarium Philosophorum, "The foundation of this art is Sol and his shadow," wherein Hermes saith "My Son, extract his shadow from the Sun beam." On the one hand, the Sun is eternal Apollo, and his shadow corporeal Dionysus, the victim of the Saturnian dismemberment and separation. Yet what do we find in the shadow of the Sun other than the Moon, his wife? Thus says the Rosarium Philosophorum: "No tincting poison is engendered without Sol and his shadow, that is his wife." 100 And again in the Turba Philosophorum: "And know ye that no body is more precious or purer than the Sun, and that no tingeing venom is generated without the Sun and its shadow." 101 "Tincting poison" or "tingeing venom" may be understood by the definition of Zosimos as spirit separated from the body, or in other words, a poison begetting the death of the alchemist. As von Franz points out, "the achievement of individuation, the realization of the self, ultimately coincides with death." 102 By the light of the Moon we descend into the depths of hell, our shadow drawing us into death that we may be reborn of ourselves.

Recall the words of Hermes Trismegistus in the *Emerald Tablet*, "Its father is the Sun and its mother the Moon." Again in *The Glory of the World; Or, Table of Paradise*, we read: "For the Sun is the Father of metals, and the Moon is their Mother: and if generation is to take place, they must be brought together as husband and wife. By itself neither can produce anything, and therefore the red and the white must be brought together." Like the phoenix, the resurrected alchemist is the divine child born of the dead father, as Horus was born from the deceased Osiris, and through the child the father's kingdom is restored. Yet none of this is possible without the mother and generative powers of the female principle, and without the shadow of the Sun. "The father is hot and dry engendering tincture, his mother is cold and moist, nourishing that which is engendered." Through the union of the mother-father pair, the philosophical stone, or divine child, is born.

Rā is also identified in a feminine form and with the star Sirius, or Sothis (Isis). ¹⁰⁵ In a list of titles from the New Empire, Isis is called "the female Rā," "the Eye of Rā," and "the maker of the sunrise." ¹⁰⁶ Sothis with its heliacal rising heralded the inundation and season of renewal, for which reason it was called a "second Sun." The rising waters of the Nile were seen as the tears of Isis mourning the death of Osiris, just as the rising waters of

the cerebrospinal fluids flood the eye of the Sun in regenerative moisture. The journey of the king, Osiris, who is like our Sulfur, mirrors the various processes in the perfection of the stone: sealed in the lead coffin; dissolved in the waters of the Nile; coagulated in the trunk of the tamarisk; separated by Set; putrefied; conceived, sublimated, and revivified with Isis (Mercury); and resurrected as the Red Stone, a perfect union of the malefemale aspects of the Soul and Spirit united in the Body of the *Rebis*, the Divine Hermaphrodite. In the same way the alchemist is resurrected in a new form when the polarities are reconciled, sharing in the immortal being of *Sol Invictus*, "first-born," a ray of eternal light shining upon the waters of the blossoming lotus.

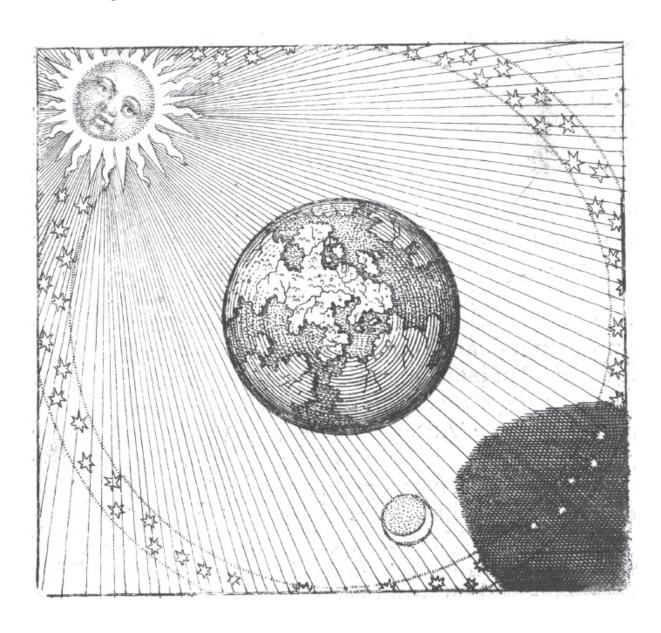


Fig. 13.5. Sol and his shadow. From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*, 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.



Fig.13.6. The rising of the resurrected Red Sun. Plate 22 from *Splendor Solis,* Germany, 1582. British Library, Harley 3469, folio 33v.

In joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain, the essence of Gold shines within every particle of matter. Everything is, at its essence, perfection. The rebirth of the Sun is the realization that there is nothing more to do than attend to the perfection of each moment—to be in perpetual motion with no

resistance to what is, seeing everything in clear daylight through the unified Eye of the macrocosmic child. The Mind, Body, and Soul are unified and illuminated with the gnosis of eternity. As solar rays mingle with the celestial waters of the Spirit, a rainbow halo of planetary unity ascends above the horizon of the Body. Thereby are the creative powers of the Soul given full authentic expression, for the imperfections and obstructions of the lower spheres have been removed by the operations of the art.



Venus The Joy of Creation

Muse, tell me the deeds of golden Aphrodite the Cyprian, who stirs up sweet passion in the gods and subdues the tribes of mortal men and birds that fly in air and all the many creatures that the dry land rears, and all that the sea: all these love the deeds of rich-crowned Cytherea.

—HOMERIC HYMN TO APHRODITE

LIKE A BRIDGE BETWEEN ABOVE AND BELOW, Venus resides in the heart chakra at the crux of our higher and lower natures, inviting us to rise above human limitations, or seducing us down the Tree in pursuit of earthly desires. Known in the Middle Ages as "lesser fortune" (Jupiter being "greater fortune"), the gentle influence of Venus embodies qualities of love, harmony, balance, splendor, luxury, affection, attraction, grace, and pleasure. The arts are her domain, for she is the joy of creation who delights in the beauty of form. In "The Virgin of the World," we learn that desire,

bliss, and laughter are gifts of Venus, that our suffering might be ameliorated. Her energy stimulates longing, contentment, and compassion, and also rage, jealousy, vanity, and abusive powers of love.

Venus, "the fairest," is considered an "inferior" planet, along with Mercury, their orbits lying inferior to Earth in relation to the Sun, as opposed to "superior" planets orbiting beyond the Earth (Mars, Jupiter, Saturn). Second only to the Moon in brightness, Venus has long inspired human imagination. Like a radiant goddess, Venus's magnitude alluringly draws our attention as she outshines the fixed and moving stars around her. Her luminous form appears near the horizon during the "magic hours" when light is most exquisite, where earthly desires meet heavenly imagination and possibility, igniting the flames of Amor and fantasy.

In the animal world, Venus is represented by the graceful winged ones—the dove, the swan, and the goose. The union of Sol and Luna is often depicted with the descent of the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove, whose white feathers symbolize purity and purification occurring in the white stage of alchemical transmutation. As the inscription carried by the dove reads, "It is the Spirit which vivifies" (*Spiritus est qui vivificat*) and unifies in the *coniunctio oppositorum*.³

The hare (Lepus) is sacred to Aphrodite, symbolizing spring's libidinal energy, regeneration, fertility, and insatiable desire. Swift, elusive, vigilant against danger, and self-protective, hares symbolize the volatile and changeable aspects of love. With its energized drive to multiply, it embodies the necessity of nature. Like the hare, fish are masters of reproduction and fertility, laying multitudes of eggs. They are sacred to foamborn Aphrodite, and into this form the goddess transformed herself when the gods were fleeing from Typhoeus.⁴ The fish is feminine and mercurial and navigates the unconscious depths, representing emotions, dreams, and slippery aspects of the psyche that evade our understanding. A related symbol of Venus is the vesica piscis, produced by two overlapping circles; the area of overlap between the circles resembles a fish or a fish bladder, hence the name, meaning "vessel of the fish." This symbol represents the alchemical union of opposites, or the marriage of heaven and earth, as well as the creative power of motherhood. The two circles are extremes finding balance, opening between them the womb of creation. Like Aphrodite, this

symbol is an archetype of ideal beauty and often featured in religious art and architecture, particularly in windows.



Fig. 14.1. Sol and Luna, stripped of their outer garments, are unified by the descending dove of Spirit.

From the Rosarium Philosophorum, woodcut 3.

Venus presides over Friday, from the Old English *frigedæg*, or "Frigga's day," corresponding with the Germanic goddess of married love and extending to an association with the goddess of love, Freya. The planet of

love rules earthy, practical, sensual Taurus (feminine) and the balanced scales of airy Libra (masculine). Taurus is the virile Bull and the energy of spring, related to the alchemical process of coagulation, signifying union. Libra represents balancing opposing principles and relates to the process of sublimation, in which lower drives transmute into higher virtues. In the body these signs correlate with the neck (Taurus) and kidneys (Libra). Venus also governs the loins, belly, and buttocks as well as cold and moist ailments, particularly in the liver, heart, stomach, and female reproductive organs. In the mineral world Venus relates to the metal copper.

Often referred to as Earth's "sister" planet, Venus is our closest planetary neighbor, second from the Sun after Mercury. According to Ptolemy, Venus's action is warming on account of her proximity to the Sun, and humidifying like the Moon and "because she appropriates the exhalations from the moist atmosphere surrounding the earth." Like Earth, Venus is a terrestrial planet, but its rotation is quite slow (one day on Venus is longer than a year) and it rotates in the opposite direction.*7 This retrograde rotation, opposite from all planets except Uranus, means the Sun rises in the west and sets in the east as viewed from the planet's surface. Its revolution around the Sun is faster than Earth's, taking about 225 days to complete a year. Another unique feature of Venus is its nearly perfect circular orbit, as opposed to the elliptical orbits of other planets. Surface temperatures on Venus are hot enough to melt lead, a feature caused by a thick atmosphere trapping the Sun's heat in a runaway greenhouse effect. This atmosphere is composed of sulfuric acid clouds and carbon dioxide gas. Beneath these thick clouds lies a fiery surface covered in vast plains, plateaus, and towering volcanoes.8

APHROGENEIA, THE FOAM-BORN GODDESS

The sulfuric, volatile, and inhospitable surface of Venus may seem contrary to the planet of love and desire. From afar, she is "Star-throned, incorruptible Aphrodite," but up close we see the planet's extremes. Fiery passion is expressed in her mythological themes of jealousy, lust, and revenge. The dark side of Venusian love finds seed in her birth, for it is said Aphrodite sprang forth parthenogenetically from the sea foam (*aphros*)

rising around the castrated parts of Ouranus, which were cut loose and flung into the sea by his son Kronos. ¹⁰ This was an act of patricide in retaliation for the children Ouranos had been locking away in Tartarus. Hence Aphrodite is *Aphrogeneia*, "the foam born," arising from the chaos of a tyrant overthrown by his son and representing both renewal and potential regression.

Plotinus differs in opinion about Aphrodite, for some said she was born from Zeus and Dione. 11 Thus Plotinus says she is twofold, one part heavenly and the other earthly. Unlike the daughter of Zeus and Dione, heavenly Aphrodite has nothing to do with marriage and exists ever above desire and the earthly sphere. 12 However, we must remember her heavenly father "took pleasure in the wicked work" of hiding his creations, much to the dismay and pain of Earth. Certainly there is a twofold nature to the goddess; however it seems fair to say her passionate and volatile aspects originate in the seed of Ouranos, more so than from Zeus, wise king of the gods. Just as Ouranos feared the defiance that would end his reign as ruler of the heavens, Aphrodite's claim to beauty becomes her weakness. We see this in the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, which begins with Aphrodite's jealousy for the beautiful mortal Myrrha, and the story of Cupid and Psyche when she punishes Psyche for her beauty, which stole attention from her. In both cases, Venus's vanity and jealousy, rooted in the fear of losing power, results in a karmic return: the death of Adonis and marriage of her son Cupid to Psyche. Aphrodite is also born with an intense need to express creative energy that was suppressed by Ouranos. If this energy is not honored it distorts into negative and injurious forms.

An enchantress and symbol of animal passions, Aphrodite is described in the *Homeric Hymns* (ca. 700 BCE) as "the mother of wild creatures." Aphrodite stimulates the attractive force of desire and impulse toward union, the physical act of love between animal bodies. All immortal gods and mortals are subject to her persuasion, save for three minds that are immune: the war goddess Athena; Artemis the wild huntress; and Hestia the sworn virgin. 15

While Renaissance artists depicted Venus in soft, enticing splendor, her more ancient form was not so purely conceived, encompassing both light and dark sides of love and sexuality, or love and war. Before the Greek Aphrodite there was another goddess of love and sexuality worshipped throughout the span of Mesopotamian civilization, known as Inanna in Sumerian (Akkadian *Ištar*; Babylonian *Ishtar*; Syrian *Ashtarte*). Three aspects of the goddess Inanna appear throughout her stories and hymns: evocation of love, sexuality, and extramarital sex; representation of the planet Venus as "Queen of Heaven"; and her warring aspect as a violent goddess lusting for power on the battlefield, "playground of Ištar." Desire for increasing her power is epitomized in her descent to the underworld and in her journey to Eridu. 17

Complimenting Inanna's aggression, her sacred beast was the lion. 18 The Assyrian goddess Ashtarte, equivalent to Venus, was depicted with a lion and called "the raging lion" or "the sky-gods' lioness." 19 The liongoddess motif is epitomized in the eleventh arcanum, Strength (Force), or Lust as Crowley names it, which represents the energy of Venus in the sign of Sun-ruled Leo. The figure exemplifies divine instinct, the force of the subconscious that is in itself holy for it contains no resistance to the flow of desire. It is the energy of pure being, unquestioned courage, and assertiveness of action, which the lion submits to willingly. Having tamed and harnessed her animalistic nature and divinity simultaneously, she liberates a potent creative force, holding in her hand the "the Holy Grail aflame with love and death." 20

REVIVIFICATION: THE LOVE OF APHRODITE AND ADONIS

Aphrodite's wrath and fierce jealousy are ignited by those who scorn worship of the goddess, improper offerings and sacrifices, and claims to beauty rivaling her own. In the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis, Adonis is the son of Myrrha, a mortal so lovely as to incite the jealous temper of Aphrodite. Out of revenge she caused Myrrha to fall in love with her own father, and when Myrrha discovered she was pregnant, she begged the gods to release her from life. Hearing her plea, the gods turned her into a myrrh tree, with drops of myrrh forming from her falling tears. Adonis was held in the trunk of the tree until a boar came along and pierced it with its tusk, causing the baby to fall out.

Aphrodite found and gave Adonis to Persephone, queen of the underworld, to be raised until she returned for him. Upon seeing him as a handsome young man, Aphrodite fell madly in love, but Persephone refused to give him up. Zeus decreed that Adonis would spend four months of the year in the underworld with Persephone, four months with Aphrodite, and the remaining time at his own discretion, which he chose to spend with Aphrodite. This time above was the spring and summer, and when harvest time came he descended back to the underworld, marking the onset of winter.

Although Aphrodite warned Adonis, he was killed by a wild boar during a hunt. According to Nonnos, the boar was jealous Ares (Mars) in disguise. After the attack, Aphrodite descended from the sky, drawn by white swans, and hastened to his side. From Aphrodite's tears a red rose bloomed, and she sprinkled his blood with sweet-smelling nectar, turning it into blood-red anemone flowers, so-named for the wind (*anemoī*). Like Adonis, its beauty is brief, for wind easily tears away the loosely held petals. 4



Fig. 14.2. "Adonis is killed by a boar, to whom Venus hasting, tinges the Roses with her blood." From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens,* 1618.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

Worship of Adonis was adopted by the Greeks from the Semitic peoples of Syria (ca. fifth century BCE). Thus the myth of Aphrodite and Adonis is the Greek version of an older myth of cyclical death and seasonal rebirth, reflected in the Syrian myth of Ashtarte and Adon, and the ancient Sumerian love poem, *The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi*. Adonis originates in the Canaanite *Adon* ("Lord" in Semitic), god of renewal, fertility, and beauty. Dumuzi was also a god of vegetal renewal, a shepherd

and the "heavenly bull" signifying the constellation Taurus, which reemerges in spring after a six-week disappearance below the horizon. This period from January to March precedes the time when the Sumerian calendar began, during which Dumuzi died, and with his union with Inanna, vegetal life was renewed.

Adon is the Hebrew form of *Aton* (also *Aten*), the Egyptian Sun god and his life-giving rays. But if Adonis represents Sol, the boar was, as Joseph Campbell says, "the force of the abyss." As we've seen, the cruelty of Mars is a necessary aspect in the Great Work as it separates, divides, and dismembers preconditioned experiences of the self, revealing the body of the resurrection. Thus we see this theme of cyclical renewal in the dying and resurrected gods Dionysus (Roman Bacchus) and Osiris (god of planet Venus in Egypt).³⁰ Like Adonis who was birthed from the trunk of the myrrh tree, the coffin of Osiris was sealed into a tamarisk tree. After Isis retrieved her husband's coffin, Set happened upon it while hunting a boar, whereupon he dismembered the body of Osiris and scattered the pieces across Egypt. When Isis reformed him, he became ruler of the dead and took up his throne in the underworld. $\frac{31}{2}$ Osiris was thus a chthonic god of fertility, symbolized both by the fertilizing flood waters of the Nile, and by the corn that was resurrected in the germination of the new seed after its time beneath the dark earth (Netherworld). 32

The revivification of nature coincides with the traditional beginning of the alchemical opus and the initiatory fire (calcinatio) and separation of Mars-ruled Aries. Following is Venus-ruled Taurus. Like the collection of the dismembered parts of Osiris and Venus birthed from Ouranos's members (medea, from which Aphrodite received the Philommedea $\frac{33}{2}$), this is when the soul recollects itself—the coagula of the alchemical solve et coagula—and prepares for another cycle of growth. In Mutus Liber (the "Silent Book") is depicted the alchemist and his soror mystica ("mystical sister") in the fields with the Aries lamb and Taurus bull, collecting generative spring dew, or prima materia from which the work begins. Hence the world is reborn and reformed after the death of winter and end of the cold, contractive Saturnian cycle. Collecting the dismembered parts of the dying god relates to the Aniada, "the fruits and powers of Paradise and of Heaven" that must be gathered to begin the Great Work. 34

The work of creative liberation necessitates a separation and a death serving as a breaking point between cycles in our unfolding. The Aries and Taurus archetypes and myths of cyclical regeneration help us understand ways this manifests in our lives. Just as we make a separation from parental figures in the process of individuation, this separation occurs at heart level in the ways we've been conditioned to love others. Aphrodite's vanity and jealousy result in the death of her *animus*, Adonis. For it is her inner masculine desire for power and glory underlying her vengeful acts and blocking her heart from the true fructifying source in Divine Love.



Fig. 14.3. The alchemist and his soror mystica collecting the spring dew of regeneration. From Isaac Baulot, *Mutus Liber*, 1702.

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

INANNA'S SHADOW: THE UNDERWORLD JOURNEY

There are times we willingly or unwillingly descend into the dark nether regions of our being. Like the alchemist descending into caverns of mines, we seek out raw and imperfect parts of ourselves to retrieve and bring them into the light of the Sun. It is a journey to realize spiritual wholeness, a confrontation with the shadow, a humbling encounter with the unknown. There is death and transformation, but first there is separation from the comfort of superficial splendor, entailing a temporary loss of creative efficacy. In these darkest moments, divine aid is available when we ask, but sacrifice is usually required.

In the Sumerian poem *The Descent of Inanna*, one of the world's oldest poems dating back to between 3500–1900 BCE, ³⁵ "Inanna abandoned heaven and earth to descend to the underworld." ³⁶ Inanna is goddess of the Great Above, while her sister Ereshkigal rules the underworld (*kur*)—the Great Below, realm of the dead. The two sisters are often considered one goddess in two aspects: ³⁷ all the light and life Inanna embodies is counterbalanced by the dark depravity of her underworld sister who drinks filthy water and eats clay, naked and alone, sexually destitute and frustrated. ³⁸ Inanna's knowledge is limited to the Above, and only by descending to the Great Below can she come to understand death and rebirth, as well as the neglected and more vulnerable parts of herself. ³⁹

On pretext of attending the funeral for Gugulanna, Ereshkigal's husband, ⁴⁰ Inanna goes to the underworld, and through a series of trials she encounters her opposite to become united with it, but this entails her own funeral. ⁴¹ Before descending to meet her sister, Inanna abandons her seven temples and gathers seven *me* ("may"), holy powers of the gods, ⁴² which she wears upon her body as a crown and other adornments. As though foreseeing her own death, she advises Ninshibur, her faithful servant, to beseech the gods for her safe return. For the union between her Higher and Lower selves to occur, Inanna must pass through seven gates, stripping herself of her divine identity, removing each of the seven *me* one by one—in essence, dying to her previous self. She reaches the Dark City humbled

before Ereshkigal, revealing her naked vulnerability. As Diane Wolkstein explains,

when [Ereshkigal] hears of the appearance at her gates of the "all-white" fertile, bedecked Goddess of Love, she is enraged, for Inanna's light, glory, and perpetual movement have, to some extent, been achieved at her expense. Ereshkigal commands Neti to divest the bright goddess of all she has accomplished so that the effervescent force of the universe, the ever-rising planet of the East, may experience what it is to be rejected—incapable of movement or relationship—and rendered *prima materia*. 43

Understanding the animosity between the two sisters may be related to Inanna's role in the death of Gugulanna in the Akkadian mythic poem *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2150–1400 BCE). While this poem may not have been known in written form when *The Descent of Inanna* was composed, it was likely known by oral tradition, explaining how the death of Gugulanna factored into Inanna's descent. Gilgamesh rejects Inanna's (Akkadian Ishtar) sexual advances, listing her abuse of past lovers and denouncing her ability to be a fit wife. In rage she sends the "Bull of Heaven"—Gugulanna—to destroy Uruk. After much destruction and the death of hundreds of men, the Bull of Heaven is slain by Gilgamesh. We easily see the shadow of Ereshkigal's dark sexuality in the vindictive rage expressed by the spurned Inanna. Perhaps her unacknowledged guilt for the death of Gugulanna draws Inanna to the underworld, as well as her pride and invulnerability. She knows her journey to the Great Below will be a confrontation with her darkness, but is compelled to go.

Now we see why Inanna's visitation to the underworld on pretext of attending Gugulanna's funeral is met by Ereshkigal with such contempt. When Neti, the gatekeeper relays to Ereshkigal that Inanna is at the gates, the Queen of the underworld "slapped her thigh and bit her lip," and "took the matter into her heart and dwelt on it." After contemplation, she commands Neti to close the seven gates of the underworld, and remove an article of Inanna's royal garments at each gate, saying "Let the holy priestess of heaven enter bowed low." 48

Inanna, exposed, stripped of her powers, and "bowed low," is found guilty by the underworld judges, and Ereshkigal fastens the eye of death upon her. 49 She is turned into a corpse, a piece of rotting meat hung from the wall. After three days and nights, Inanna is resurrected by Divine aid. No one is allowed to just leave the Netherworld, however, so Inanna must choose someone to take her place. When she finds her lover Dumuzi, dressed in fine *me* garments and seated upon his throne, showing no signs of mourning her, she chooses him as her replacement. Such is her sacrifice.

In another poem called *The Return*, Inanna remembers her love for Dumuzi and mourns him. Finding his sister Geshtinanna beset with grief, the two of them find him. Inanna takes his hand, telling him he will spend half the year in the underworld, and Geshtinanna will take his place for the other half. Thus together Geshtinanna and her brother preside over the eternal cycles of death and the revivification of nature. Dumuzi is given new life, and during his time above, the earth blossoms and bears fruit. His time in the underworld is the passage of winter. Through humbling confrontation with the unconscious, the sacrifice of Dumuzi, and subsequent grief, Inanna receives gnosis, and the dark Ereshkigal is praised:

Holy Ereshkigal! Great is your renown! Holy Ereshkigal! I sing your praises! 51

PHOSPHORUS AND HESPERUS: SYNODIC CYCLES OF VENUS

The story of Inanna's descent mirrors the journey that Venus takes through the skies. From our terrestrial viewpoint, Venus is visible in the morning and evening sky, just before dawn and sunset, at different points in its synodic cycle. Early Greeks thought these were distinct celestial objects, which they called morning star (Stella matutina) and evening star (Stella vespertina). The morning star they named Phosphorus, meaning "harbinger of light," or "light-bringer" (Lucifer) because it appears in the eastern skies heralding the dawn. The evening star was named Hesperus, son of Atlas. The Mesopotamians considered Venus bisexual, changing sexes between evening star and morning star, though traditions conflicted on which of

these were male and female. 52 Female Venus was benefic, and male Venus was considered malefic, corresponding to her dual aspects as lover and warrior. 53

Venus passes through four distinct stages in her synodic cycle, like the cycles of growth and waning of the Moon. These are the inferior conjunction, morning star, superior conjunction, and the evening star. During her inferior conjunction (IC), Venus descends into the underworld, disappearing from view for about eight days in what might be considered its new moon phase. This occurs when Venus is closest to Earth, positioned between the Sun and Earth, with its light obscured by the Sun. From our terrestrial view its movement is retrograde.

With her heliacal rising Venus is reborn as morning star, and the next 263 days the planet appears on the eastern horizon with the dawn. The morning star was often thought of as a warrior. Twenty-one days following IC, Venus stations direct, and at thirty-six days the planet becomes more luminous in the morning sky. Venus reaches maximum elongation seventy-two days after IC, which means it is at its farthest point away from the Sun.

The superior conjunction (SC) begins about 216 days after IC when Venus is on the other side of the Sun and disappears from view, when Venus is "full." This represents another phase of withdrawal and internal reflection much longer than the first. After SC comes a time of purification in the rebirth of Venus as evening star, a period associated with Venus as lover lasting about 263 days, during which it is visible in western skies at dusk.

Venus completes one full synodic cycle—retrograde to retrograde—every 584 days (about eighteen months). With each conjunction with the Sun, Venus creates a point on a five-pointed star drawn in the heavens. 55 Thus the number five is sacred to Venus, symbolized by Aphrodite's apple, with its five-petaled blossom and the five-pointed star in its center when cleaved in half, as well as the five-petaled rose, symbolizing generation, purity, love, the heart, and unfolding enlightenment. The five-pointed star is the microcosmic human being and five elements. Five synodic cycles of Venus take eight years to transpire, hence the number eight is also sacred to the goddess, as seen in the eight-pointed star of Ishtar.

LUCIFER AND THE FALL

Lucifer, the "light bringer," or the morning star, offers us knowledge of self, requiring separation from the participation mystique of undifferentiated consciousness. 56 The dark night of the soul is a time of being drawn into suffering's depths, when the lamp of knowing is snuffed out and temptations lure us into habitual patterns of distraction, numbing the pain or otherwise coping with the torments of separation. Thus we encounter the poisonous and devouring dragon that must be endured with patience and fortitude, for when it passes, a higher state of integrated consciousness is left in its wake. Through an alchemical process of calcination, requiring endurance, courage, and ultimately, surrender to the flames, the soul is purified. So long as the dragon is avoided, it remains poison lurking in caverns of the mind, and we naturally magnetize situations and experiences that stir the dragon to awaken. Surrendering to this transformative force requires an act of bravery like Inanna's descent, and simultaneous relinquishing of ego.

Israel Regardie equates the red dragon with "inverted power of the Eros," which seizes us until we unite unconscious and conscious realms within to attain liberation, in which participation mystique is experienced consciously. Lucifer offers salvation through falling and a journey of self-knowledge. We cannot attain to the heavens without traversing the underworld and understanding the depths of sorrow and separation, for this is an unavoidable part of our own creation. As Crowley explains, it is a necessary death and "no means of alleviating it may be employed." The Fall, linked with original sin, is the *curse* of knowledge and free will drawing us into animalistic passions and urges. Yet it is libidinal energy that gives rise to humanity's creative power, and Venus teaches us to channel this life-force into creation for the benefit of our shared existence.

The collective unconscious lies beyond our ability to perceive or interpret. It is the albumen holding together the world, interpenetrating everything and yet unseen, the field of unlimited possibilities and accumulation of all potential realities. It is chaos preceding creation, which through the overwhelming power of love emerges into consciousness. Thus in Hesiod's *Theogony*, Eros (Love) came into being after Chaos. In the same way, the creative act begins with darkness from which seeds of

creation must be drawn out through the light-power of seduction, enticement of the Muse, courage, and unrestrained desire for life. Turning inward, self-love coils itself around the egg of the world, tightening until it cracks open, the creative impulse bursting forth into manifestation.

SOL, VENUS, AND THE NECESSITY OF DESIRE

The daily transits of the Sun and Venus, being closely aligned, and the position of Venus between the Earth and Sun, have given Venus the role of "messenger of the Sun." The relationship between them is reflected in the Qabalistic Tree of Life, which assigns the Sun to the sixth sephirah centered in the heart, Tiphareth (Beauty). Truly, the Sun finds its place in each of the seven chakras as their highest perfection, and every chakra is a band of solar light. Both Venus and the Sun exhibit a death and rebirth process; the Sun in seasonal cycles and Venus with conjunctions.

Venus is the seventh sephirah, Netzach, or Victory, the "occult intelligence" of the mysteries and the sphere that "emanates the inspiration not only of the artist but of all who work creatively." 1 It is victory over the self and of creative achievement, symbolized by the perfection of the rose, and having overcome creative inertia to activate full creative potential. In this way we experience the gifts of Venus—bliss and joy—through the creative process. This creative energy is the vital generation of Venus wed with the fire of Geburah (Mars) reflected in Netzach, the first and highest of the four elemental sephirah (Hod/Water, Yesod/Air, Malkuth/Earth). Netzach relates to the shapes of the heptagon and the heptagram, the seven colors of the rainbow, seven days of the week, seven chakras, seven planets, and seven metals. It is the wholeness achieved through integration of the shadow.

Whereas the Sun resides in the heart of the Tree of Life, of the chakras Venus is ruler of the heart, *Anahata*, perfectly balanced between above and below, with three spiritual chakras above, and three earthly chakras below. This chakra vibrates to the color green and expresses the air element, which exists at the interface between Spirit and Form. Within the body the heart

chakra regulates the heart and lungs, governing the sense of touch. It is the vital breath of life and desire.

Anuket, also known as Anukis, was goddess of desire and lust in the Egyptian pantheon, her name meaning "to embrace," for her embrace signified the time of the fertilizing floods. 63 She was worshipped in the form of a gazelle, a symbol of nimble grace, 64 and as a woman with a crown of feathers. She signifies the necessity of desire and the life-giving waters that renew and replenish the earth. To desire is a natural drive, a guide giving purpose and meaning to life, arising until fulfilled or released, then arising in a new form. Daily we desire food and water, shelter and sleep. We desire to have more beyond our current lot, to be more and better than we now are. When one desire is fulfilled another arises. We desire to be loved, to love, and to receive the best of what this world has to offer. And within all of our desires is the desire to be free of suffering, to be liberated from constraints and limitations of the body and torture of the mind, to be atoned with our Soul. While desire is seen to be a source of suffering, it is not desire itself that causes suffering, but attachment to it and fear of its unfulfillment that haunts the soul and corrupts the mind in cyclical, compulsive thought patterns. Yet desire and love brought forth our very being, as is written in the "Pæmandres" (CH 1.12):

But All-Father Mind, being Life and Light, did bring forth Man coequal to Himself, with whom He fell in love, as being His own child; for he was beautiful beyond compare, the Image of his Sire. In very truth, God fell in love with His own Form and on him did bestow all of His own formations.⁶⁵

The Mind within us holds the same power of formation, by which is meant creation. To manifest desire, it is necessary to raise oneself beyond lower spheres of fate and rest in the creative sphere of imagination, where any and all things are possible.

Desire is a gift bestowed by our very own essence, but the pitfall is being ruled by it, moving through life like trains upon set tracks without creative volition. Desire is the manifestation of Love, and Love is the binding force of all that exists and that which propels creation. The object of Desire is not in itself the issue that generates suffering, but ignorance of

one's own formative powers to create—or negate through negative thought. In order to become what we wish, we must become it—not through sheer force of Will and motive action, but through presence of Mind and gnosis of Self as Creator, and abandonment of fixed conceptions of who we are and what is possible. We fall in love with our creation in the formative sphere of imagination, filled with desire and its fulfillment.

We are Body, Mind, and Soul, and the Body is that which dissolves upon death and reforms through continuance of the immortal Soul. Thus desires of the body are not to be denied or otherwise disdained, but recognized as aspects of deeper desire we have for union and ultimate fulfillment in the Divine. No earthly desire will satisfy this longing. Once we fulfill a desire another arises. Yet it is through the pursuit and fulfillment of earthly desire that we realize there is only one true desire: to exist as the complete and unlimited creator that we are. It is in mistaking the things of matter for the ultimate goal that we falter, for this is "love that is deceived and that deceives" (*CH* 16.16). 66 If instead we understand our power as creators, and in this way act upon desire, then fulfillment confirms the Good within us, and we begin to transcend earthly desires and apply our creative will to higher aims.

THE ANKH AND IMMORTALITY

The Ankh, or crux ansata ("cross with a handle"), is the ancient Egyptian symbol of life dating back to the early dynastic period (ca. 3150–2613 BCE). The was the symbol of life, also representing life after death, and often shown held in the hands of gods in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, stone engravings, and tomb paintings. The ankh resembles and is related to the symbol of Venus, a circle mounted on a cross. Through male (cross) and female (circle) qualities it represents the hermaphroditic unification of opposites, as well as the unification of heaven and earth, the eternal and temporal. It is also the only planetary symbol that encompasses and unifies all ten sephiroth on the Tree of Life through the power of love, with the upper six sephiroth held in the loop, and the four elements in the tau cross below.

In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the deceased holds the ankh as they enter the Hall of Two Truths, where their heart is weighed on the scales of

Ma'at, symbolizing their desire to attain immortality. It is a key to the Tomb of the Adepti⁷¹ and the door or gateway to be opened; when held by the loop, the ankh resembles a key, and the corresponding Hebrew letter for Venus is *Daleth* (door). The key to passing through the Venusian doorway between mortal life and immortality is lightness of heart.



Fig. 14.4. A wooden ankh from Egypt, Middle Kingdom, ca. 1981–1802 BCE.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1912.

The Egyptian ankh is particularly sacred to Isis and called the "Girdle of Isis," more often depicted by a related symbol called the *tyet*, which is like

the ankh with bent arms, and lines resembling ropes. The tyet was considered to be the knot in the girdle as well as the blood of Isis, $\frac{72}{1}$ representing fertility and generative powers. 73 While knots may be the unification of opposites, the "knots of Nephthys" are also entanglements of consciousness that must be untied in order to attain immortality. Both the tyet and ankh provide us with the symbolic key to unlock the mysteries, pointing to the importance of the heart's virtue and untying karmic patterns that bind us in cycles of suffering. This concept is found in other spiritual traditions, such as the Greek story of the Gordian knot, and in the Mahayana Buddhist text Surangama Sutra, where Buddha explains to a congregation of aspirants how the six sense perceptions are like six knots in a silk cloth. Each of the knots must be untied from the center; they cannot be untied all at once. The Spanish mystic Abraham Abulafia (born 1240, died post-1291) developed methods not unlike modern psychoanalysts for loosening these knots and achieving prophetic inspiration. Like a Jewish form of yoga, his methods incorporated the use of breath, mantra, and asana (postures) to alter consciousness. He believed in the need "to unseal the soul, to untie the knots which bind it."75

THE BENEDICTA VIRIDITAS: COPPER VERDIGRIS

In the *Hall ar-Rumūz*, by Muḥammad ibn Umail, he says the first name of the stone is the "fountains of copper." Copper is a symbol of the microcosm as well as the *prima materia*; as Zosimos writes: "Copper is like a human being: it has a spirit, a soul, and a body. It is necessary before everything to break up and cause to crumble the grossness of the body, and to turn it into a tincturing spirit, agreeable to everybody." Further, in the visions of Zosimos, he describes a man of copper who has "changed the color of his nature," becoming first silver, and then a man of gold. 77

Within the warm reddish luster of copper is hidden the solar gold. Copper is highest of the terrestrial metals and takes on the role of gold on the lower, material plane, which is to realize the purification, perfection, and liberation of the earthly soul. The *Book of Sophé*, attributed to Zosimos, compares copper to a flower: "Just as there exists a sun, a flower of the fire, a heavenly sun, the right eye of the cosmos; in the same way the copper,

when it becomes a flower through the purification, becomes an earthly soul, which is the king on earth like the sun is the king of heaven." Like a flower, the purified and perfected soul has a crown of radiating petals drinking in the sunlight from all 360 degrees.

The ancient Greeks derived most of their copper from the island of Cyprus, *Kupros* (Greek), from which the metal gets its name. This is the mythical birthplace of Aphrodite, hence her epithet of the Cyprian goddess. Copper is a soft, malleable metal easily bonded with other metals to make alloys, such as with tin to make bronze. Propensity for *union* may be why copper was associated with Venus. Yet just as copper is easily bonded, it is easily influenced by outer forces and subject to the poisonous but beautiful green patina, or verdigris, forming when the metal is exposed to the elements (air and water) or acetic acid, an oxidative reaction resulting from loss of electrons. This splendid green color is significant on account of its imperfection, for the "corruption" of the metal is the means by which the soul is purified and redeemed. It is the *enantiodromia* or transformation of the natural reddish metal into its opposite green by the process of corrosion, mirrored in the corruption of love.

Green is the color of the heart chakra, and Regardie refers to a brilliant, emerald-green color that arises from the beams of Chesed (Jupiter) and Tiphareth (Sun) meeting in Netzach (Venus). He writes that "the Sphere of its operations is that of *Nogah* or External Splendour, producing zeal, love, harmony, and it ruleth the Sphere of Action of the Planet Venus and the nature of the vegetable World." The duality of Venus is expressed in the symbol itself, with a circle representing Gold, the immortal Soul, resting above a cross, symbolic of the corrosive nature of matter. This exemplifies why copper and love both have dangerous aspects. This corrupt or "leprous" greenness is also the *Benedicta viriditas* or "blessed greenness" spoken of by Hildegard von Bingen, referring to fecundity of the spirit as it grows toward the Divine. This corruption is transformed into gold, as described in the *Rosarium Philosophorum*:

Know therefore that copper, which is the gold of the Philosophers, is their gold, but Senior said "Our gold is not common gold." And you have sought after the greenness, thinking that copper had been a leprous body by reason of that greenness which it hath. Whereupon, I tell you that all that is perfect in copper is only that greenness which is in it, because that greenness is by our magistery quickly turned into our most pure gold.84

The degeneration of copper should not be avoided, disparaged, or otherwise dualistically rejected in favor of the untarnished metal; just as the baser aspects of love, like jealousy, possessiveness, insecurity, and projection are blessed growths from which we may derive the Gold of pure consciousness. It is only in passing through the Abyss that we confront our own imperfections and thereby attain gnosis of the eternal Self, which is revived by the Holy Spirit. Basil Valentine says Venus "is cloathed [sic] with a Celestial sulphur which far surpasses the brightness of the Sun; for there is more and more abundant Sulphur in her than in Gold." The Spirit of copper can ripen and perfect the other imperfect metals, despite its own imperfect Body, on account of the incorruptible Gold within it.

Perfection attained through corruption is the necessity of exposing the external, or superficial divinity, to the corrosive action of spirit, so that the true, latent divinity can be born out of it. Spirit may be either air or water, corresponding to thought and emotion. The air creates a brilliant green landscape upon the heart, just as it provides atmosphere for life to grow on the Earth (earth is an anagram for heart). So Just as air and water may corrupt copper, toxic thoughts and emotions can overwhelm the heart. Interestingly, acetic acid, a primary component of vinegar, also has this polluting effect, which is why Maier equates the boar that mauls Adonis with "the sharpness of Vinegar, or dissolving water, which hath terrible teeth like a Boar." Thus death precedes the greenness and regeneration of vegetation associated with the dying and resurrected gods.

The "degreening" of the Earth, "little brother" of Venus, by the insatiable desires of humanity is an interesting reflection of the corruption of copper. Perhaps the ancient symbol of the goddess Isis is also the key to transforming our corruption as a species into a new Golden Age. On that note, the ankh is also called a "sandal strap," and was said by Crowley to be the "means of progress through the worlds, which is the distinguishing mark of godhead." In this context, we can say that the heart is the key to creating a new world, and for the godhead—immortal consciousness—to be revealed within each of us by the corrosive action of physical existence.



Mercury A Voice from the Æther



Come unto me, Lord Hermes, thou of many names, who know'st the secrets hidden both beneath the poles [of heaven] and underneath the earth.

—Greek Magical Papyri

MYSTAGOGUE, PSYCHOPOMP, MESSENGER, and magician, Mercury is the Great Reconciler of all opposites, the Master of Masters, the Lord of Wisdom, keeper of the mysteries, the one of many names who stands at infinity's gates. Whether we call him Thoth, Tehuti, Mercury, Hermes, or Odin, he is yet unnameable, both male and female, light and dark, young and old, light and heavy, everywhere and nowhere, present in all times and places and transcending the boundaries of categorization. Mercury is the means by which gold is perfected, the Spirit that dissolves

and unifies, the waters of the wise, the cerebrospinal fluid, and the quintessence. He is the ætheric element encompassing all the other elements and the substance of their expression, the neutral field in which the polarities dance, the fabric through which vibrations move. As the whole of the Hermetic art and philosophy rests upon the broad shoulders of Hermes, it is no easy task to distill the essence of this god into a single chapter. Nonetheless, we shall make our best attempt to fix the volatile and evasive nature of Mercury for just long enough to see what is ultimately unknowable. Thus we follow his voice into the dark caverns of the earth, and fly with him to the heavens, opening our minds to the magic of creation.

In the Hermetic teachings, it is the sphere of Mercury where the soul develops "the ability to speak and interpret, hermeneutikon." From "fairwinged Hermes" we draw the power of reason (Stob. 24), and he bestows upon humanity prudence, wisdom, persuasiveness, and truth, always lending his support toward the spirit of Invention (Stob. 25, 17). In the return ascent through the second zone of Mercury, according to the Corpus Hermeticum (1.25), the soul sheds itself of the "Device of Evils." In Salaman's translation, the word trickery is added here, for just as powerful as the gift of speech may be in the realm of creation, it is also a means of deception. Hence Crowley says Mercury represents "both truth and falsehood, wisdom and folly."

Mercury, "the glittering star," is one of the inner (inferior) planets, along with Venus. Because its orbit lies between the Sun and Earth, it is only visible within 28° of the Sun, appearing briefly for an hour and a half before sunrise and after sunset. It is the smallest and fastest planet, perhaps explaining why Mercury was known as the "jumping one," by the ancient Babylonian astrologers. Its close proximity to the Sun is related by Ptolemy to causing dryness, and yet Mercury's effects are also humidifying on account of his proximity to the sphere of the Moon; his speedy motion causing a rapid alternation between these two effects. 9

The metal corresponding to Mercury is the swift-moving mercury, or quicksilver, unique among metals as being liquid at room temperature. Alchemically Mercury's names are as multitudinous as the complexity of his slippery nature—argent vive, aqua vitae, Spirit, tincture, philosophical

water, vinegar, the white stone, virgin's milk, azoth, the chief medicine; Mercury is called *argent vive*, "living silver," because it seems alive, trembling at length from the slightest vibration. Bartlett explains that Mercury contains the qualities of the other noble metals: "bright like silver and heavy like gold." It is the female counterpart to the male gold (Sun), and the philosopher's stone is produced from their union. 11

In general Mercury is said to be neutral, exhibiting both benefic and malefic tendencies depending on where it occurs in relation to other planets and which sign it occupies in a given chart. This neutrality makes Mercury a fitting ruler for the middle of the week, *mittwoch* ("midweek") in German, or Wednesday, from the Old English *wodnesdæg*, "Woden's day." Woden is a variation of the Norse god, Odin, often associated with Mercury. The Romans referred to Wednesday by the Latin name *dies Mercurii*, or "day of Mercury." 13

Mercury is, in a cosmic sense, the child of the Sun and Moon. He rules the zodiac signs Gemini (+), the Twins, and Virgo (-), the Virgin, between which are situated the signs of the luminaries, Cancer (Moon) and Leo (Sun). In the body Ptolemy assigns Mercury to "speech and thought, the tongue, the bile, and the buttocks," while Valens gives him "authority over the hands, shoulders, fingers, joints, belly, ears, windpipe, guts, tongue." In the subtle body Mercury rules the throat chakra (*Vishuddhi*), the center of communication, personal truth, self-expression, speech, hearing, the fifth element æther, and the thyroid gland.

The ancient Babylonians associated Mercury with the Akkadian god Nabû, god of wisdom who was considered a savior and redeemer. Like the Egyptian Thoth, Nabû was the "divine scribe of the destinies," and a patron god of writing, often portrayed with a writing stylus and clay tablet, and sometimes riding a snake-dragon. Because of its appearance as both a morning and evening star, Mercury was sometimes thought of as bisexual. Mercury is sometimes associated with the Moon in Babylonian astrology, an association in the Hindu tradition as well, for the planet is called *Budh* or *Budha*, the son of the Moon, named Soma for the intoxicating juice of the gods. In the Hindu pantheon Mercury bears a strong correlation with Nārada, the son of Brahmā, the artful and eloquent messenger of the gods.

Like Mercury inventing the lyre, Nārada invented the Indian lute, or vina, and was renowned as a skilled musician.²¹

THE YOUTHFUL MESSENGER

The Roman god Mercury, from whom the swift-moving planet derives its name, is the spritely messenger of the gods that loves to serve as companion to mortals. He is a page-like youth, animated and flying between the heavens and humanity, establishing the will of his father, Jupiter. In the Orphic Hymn to Mercury he is a friend of humanity, bringing discourse, profits, and peace; a messenger with "dire weapon of the tongue." Mercury was closely identified with the Greek Hermes, who was born in a cave from the union of Zeus and Maia, daughter of Atlas and oldest of the seven Pleiades. Hermes was a thief, trickster, and sage; a god of communication, travel, and commerce. He is sometimes depicted with a beard, though often not, and usually carries his snake-twined staff (caduceus), a wide-brimmed winged hat (*petasus*), winged sandals (*talaria*), a purse, and the reed pipe. 25

Hermes likely derived his name from the Greek *herma*, "stone heap," referring to piles of stones placed as boundary markers, making Hermes a god of boundaries and guide to wayfarers. This also relates to his role as Hermes *Psychopompos*, crossing the boundaries between life and death. Hermes was originally worshipped in the form of these phallic pillars (cairns), and orgiastic dances were conducted around them in honor of his mother, the earth goddess. Herodotus recounts that the ithyphallic images of Hermes (*Hermai*) were the ritual objects celebrated in the rites of the Cabiri in the Samothracian mysteries. Hence Hermes had associations with fertility and prosperity. Hence Hermes had associations

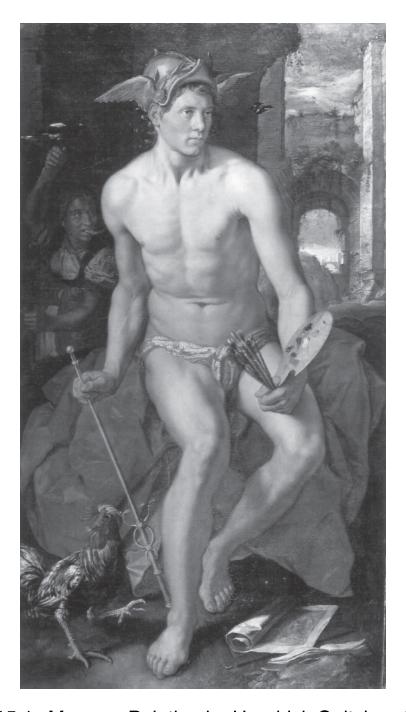


Fig. 15.1. *Mercury.* Painting by Hendrick Goltzius, 1611. Mercury: A Voice from the Æther 257

In the Homeric Hymn to Hermes,²⁹ he was the "luck-bringing messenger" who sprang swiftly into action upon birth, straight away inventing the seven-stringed lyre. On the eve of his birth he stole fifty cattle from Apollo's herd, which he adamantly denied when Apollo confronted

him. The matter was taken up with their father Zeus; seeing through his lies, Zeus bid them both to find the cattle and settle the matter. Through the ordeal Apollo and Hermes became friends; Hermes gifted Apollo the lyre and in turn Apollo gave him a golden staff with three branches—the caduceus—to protect him and aid him in his work, as well as the powers to induce sleep or awaken. ³⁰ Apollo also advised him where to find the Thriae, three prophetic winged Virgins of Parnassus, to learn the art of divination.

Hermes was sometimes called *Argeiphontes*, ³¹ "slayer of Argus," for having beheaded the hundred-eyed giant after lulling him to sleep with his reed pipe and magic wand. ³² Wearing the helmet of Hades, said to give the power of invisibility, Hermes slew the giant Hippolytus. ³³ Hermes had a habit of turning others into rocks. In Ovid's version of the story of Apollo's stolen cattle, Mercury's theft was witnessed by an old man named Battus. Accepting a bribe from the thieving god, Battus promised to be silent as a stone. Mercury returned in disguise and tricked the duplicitous old man into revealing the thief, then punished the liar by transforming him into a "hard flint rock, still known as a kind of informer, the ancient stigma attaching itself to the innocent touchstone." ³⁴ Hermes employed this metamorphosis again in the story of Aglauros, when he fell in love with her sister Herse. Aglauros was overcome by the demon Envy by the workings of Minerva and transformed into stone by Hermes. ³⁵

Prevalent in the mythology of Hermes are stories of his role as a guide and psychopomp, for Zeus appointed Hermes as the official messenger to Hades. Most notably he retrieved Persephone from the underworld after her abduction by Hades. Her mother Demeter, goddess of the harvest, bereft and grievous in her daughter's absence, withheld her seed from the earth. However Persephone, having tasted the sweet pomegranate seeds of Hades, was obligated to spend a third of the year beneath the "secret places of the earth" in the dark and gloom with Hades, and the other two parts of the year she remained with the deathless gods, when the earth would flourish again. 37

THOTH: LORD OF UTTERANCE

Many of the attributes of Hermes are shared by his Egyptian counterpart, Thoth, of whom much has already been said. The name Thoth is a Greek transliteration of the Egyptian *Tehuti* (also *Tahuti*). In the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Thoth is the "great of magic in the Bark of Millions of Years," he who "speaks with his great incantations which are in his body and which issue from his mouth." Through Thoth, Ra gave humanity magic spells to protect them in their lives upon the earth. As both a creator god in himself as well as the heart of the artist and creator god, Ptah, Thoth represents the creative will of the universe, his thoughts manifested into form through the power of utterance with eloquent speech and divine magical words.

A god of justice and law, Thoth was a reconciler of the gods Horus and Set, representative of the order and chaos of the world. Like the neutral planet Mercury, Thoth is usually depicted as neutral between the two opposing gods, though sometimes he aligns more with one or the other. His eternal task is the mediation of good and evil, and maintaining the equilibrium of cosmic order. He also played a major role in establishing and maintaining social order. He was "the Lord of Justice" and "judge of truth," acting as judge to the gods and as the legal defender of Horus to prove his legitimacy as successor to Osiris. He vindicated Osiris (the deceased), dispelling darkness and storms, 43 and destroyed the enemies of Ra, taking up position at the prow of his solar bark; 44 hence he was intimately connected with the daily cycles of the Sun.

In the form of an ibis or an ibis-headed man, Thoth was the purveyor of wisdom, bestowing upon humanity the gifts of magic, alchemy, astrology, writing, speech, science, medicine, and mathematics. He was known as a physician, but Thoth's power to heal was through magical means rather than by drugs, and he was known as "Thoth, Lord of Heaven, who givest all life, all health." Thoth assisted Isis in restoring the deceased Osiris to life, and helped her teach her knowledge of magic and medical arts to humanity. With the power of Ra, Thoth healed the baby Horus of the poison of Set, thus preventing darkness from taking over the world. As psychopomp, he guided souls into the underworld and observed as recorder the weighing of the heart of the deceased in the Hall of Judgment. As the cynocephalic (dog-headed) baboon, Thoth was the tongue of the balance of the scales of Ma'at. He is both the Moon and the protector of the Moon, keeper of time and prophet of the future. The ape is a creature that imitates

or mimics the mind and the word of Thoth, in the same way that the Moon reflects the light of consciousness, and hence the ape is an approximation of the mind, rather than its essence.

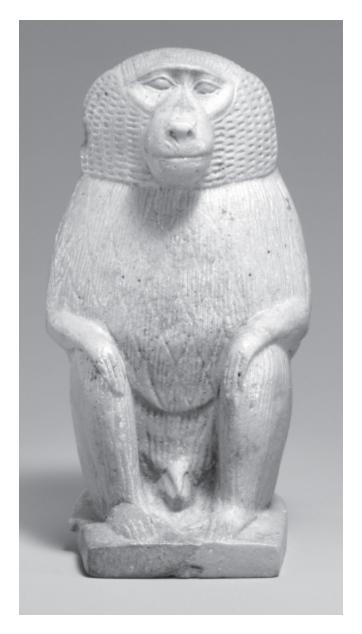


Fig. 15.2. Thoth in the form of a cynocephalus ape, 664–380 BCE.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The original scribe of the gods and the personal scribe of Osiris, Thoth is attributed with inventing writing, for which reason he is known as the

"Lord of Hieroglyphics." He is the patron of all books and libraries of knowledge, and his wife and assistant Seshat (or Sheshat) shared these attributes. Thoth is the "skilled scribe whose hands are pure, a possessor of purity, who drives away evil, who writes what is true, who detests falsehood, whose pen defends the Lord of All; master of laws who interprets writings." Upon his word that the heart of the deceased carried no sin and had been weighed in the Great Balance, the Great Ennead spared the heart from the Great Devourer, Ammit, and granted him a place with Osiris in the Field of Offerings. 51

POWERS OF ABOVE AND BELOW

With his position of neutrality, and as the fifth element, Mercury holds the potential to unify the *quaternio* of the elements—what Jung calls the *tetrasomia*. Thus we return to the philosophical problem of squaring the circle, for Hermes is both round and square, as observed in the hermai, which were constructed of a square stone pillar crowned with a stone head of Hermes. He is also a triad, the triple-headed serpent, thus bringing together the circle, the square, and the triangle. In the *Greek Magical Papyri* (5.400–403) his circular aspect is referred to as the Moon:

Hermes, lord of the world, who're in the heart,
O circle of Selene, spherical
And square, the founder of the words of speech. 53

As a tetrad he is Mercury *quadratus*, the "arcane substance through whose transformation the *lapis*, or goal of the *opus*, is produced;" having a four-part nature he refers to the four stages of the alchemical *opus:* nigredo, albedo, citrinitas, and rubedo. Hermes draws his knowledge from the four corners of the earth and the four quarters of heaven. In the Greek Magical Papyri (8.1–63) his names and forms are invoked as an ibis in the east, a dog-faced baboon in the west, a serpent in the north, and a wolf in the south 55

Here followeth the Figure conteyning all the fecrets of the Treatife both great & small



Fig. 15.3. Ripley's Wheel: The figure containing all the secrets of the Treatise both great and small. From George Ripley's

The Compound of Alchymie, in Elias Ashmole, Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, 1652.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

Thoth is the head of the four male-female deities of the Ogdoad, and Mercury is the quintessence of intuition (fire-wolf), thought (air-ibis), feeling (water-baboon), and sensation (earth-serpent). In the tarot, Mercury is represented by the first arcanum, the Magus, Juggler, or Magician who wields the four elemental weapons of the wand, sword, cup, and disk. Upon his hat is the lemniscate (∞) , symbol of infinity and unifying power, by which he perfects the balance between the left and right hemispheres of the brain and the male-female polarities. This symbol of the dyad is emblematic of continual change and the intuitive state of infinite flow.

When the square of the elements is spun, it is doubled, putting order into motion. Such is the turning of the seasons, producing the eightspoked wheel of the year observed by the pagans, which celebrates the four major solsticial and equinoctial events and the midpoints between them. Mercurius sets in motion the *opus circulatorium*. His symbol is the octangle, manifesting as the octagram or eight-pointed star, which represents the "binding together of the concentrated Positive and Negative Forces of the Elements under the name IAHDONHI [ADONAI]." The alchemical *circulatio* sets the four elemental pairs into continual motion by which they are turned and transformed. Mercury's fluidity and swiftness is chaotic when it is separated from the stabilizing cross of the elements, yet the wheel brings unity through motion and balance.

The vertical eight and horizontal lemniscate (∞) form the two axes of the cross of humanity. Vertically lies the potential for a free flow between Above and Below, macrocosm and microcosm. Therefore Hermes, "who know(s) the things hidden beneath heaven and earth" ($PGM \ 8.1-63$)⁵⁷ holds the astrolabe, a device for astrological measurements, commanding the powers of the macrocosm to unify Above and Below (see figure 15.4). Horizontally is the balance between right and left, male and female, active and passive. The center of the eight and lemniscate is composed of an X marking the crossover of energy. Together there are two X's correlating with the twentieth arcanum of the tarot, the Judgment or Aeon (Crowley), card of the resurrection.

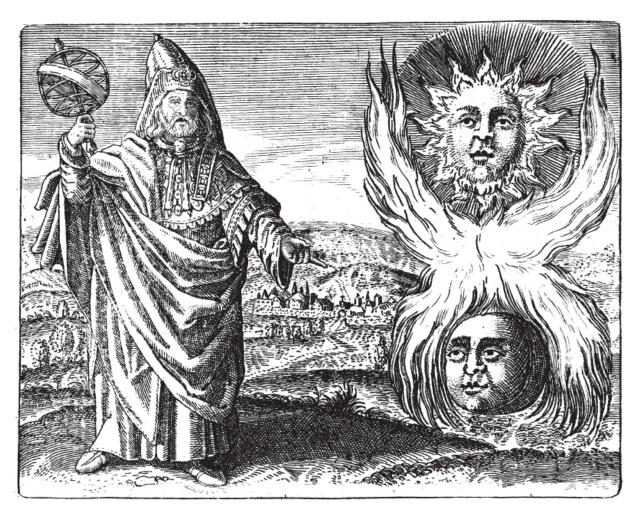


Fig. 15.4. Hermes Trismegistus, god of Above and Below. From Daniel Stolcius, *Viridarium Chymicum*, 1624. Courtesy of Wellcome Collection. Creative Commons license.

In *Meditations on the Tarot*, the author denotes the difference in action between the vertical and horizontal axes as the difference between creation and imitation. $\frac{58}{8}$ Authentic creativity is the divine word of Thoth the ibis, who flies between above and below, as opposed to the imitation of the ape, who rests upon the horizontal scales. Authentic creation requires a reconciliation of the east-west polarization and the north-south separation between spirit and matter, thus establishing a four-fold flow. The overlay of the 8 and lemniscate (∞) forms a four-petaled flower, also resembling a four-leaf clover (as in the center of Ripley's wheel, figure 15. 3). At the center point of convergence is the fifth element, Æther or Mind. Imitation is a mechanism of the unconscious mind that has not yet begun the work of

reconciliation. It is the ape-mind that imitates until it learns for itself that the Creator exists within. The discord between the lower spheres is brought to balance by Thoth, the "judge of the two opponent gods," ⁵⁹ who restores equilibrium through consciousness.

In the Corpus Hermeticum (CH 1.15), perfect harmony is to realize one's transcendence over the Harmony: "Thus though above the Harmony, within the Harmony he hath become a slave. Though male-female, as from a Father male-female, and though he's sleepless from a sleepless [Sire], yet is he overcome [by sleep]."60 In sleep, or unconsciousness, the Harmony (or disharmony) creates a dramatic soundtrack to our lives. There is no moral dilemma here. Only a question of being in the Harmony or above it, as one is asleep or awake. Asleep, we have become identified with Creation; awake, we remember our true identity as Creator. The Artifex, whose work is born from the Creator, engages the Harmony with the mastery that can only be attained by living in a waking dream. The Taoists call it "the way" and it's a timeless flow between the polarities: "The way is broad, reaching left as well as right." Being above the Harmony means existing at the level of the eighth, where we access true imagination and authentic creativity, like the disciple who proclaims: "I am the instrument of your spirit, mind is your plectrum, and your guidance makes music with me" (NHC 6.6).⁶² This is reflected in the "Perfect or Absolute Intelligence" and creative "Splendor" of the eighth sephirah, Hod, the fluid mind of hermaphroditic Mercury, the divine waters wherein symbolic forms coalesce from the interplay of imagination and will. 63

In his writings on Hermetic astronomy, Paracelsus describes an eightfold astrology composed of four elemental stars; a star for humanity; a star for the animals; a "superior star" as the seventh; and an eighth star as the "imagination in man, superior to all the rest." The eighth star is superior to the others, but they will not act in accord with the imagination lest they be reconciled with each other. So long as there is disharmony among the seven, that which is imagined as a directive of higher consciousness will be influenced by the disharmonies of the lower spheres. If the seven are unified into vertical alignment, however, a pillar of seven notes and colors of the spectrum appears. This is the vertical rainbow pictured in the fourteenth arcanum, Art or Temperance, its number denoting the seven doubles that are unified through alchemical fusion. As previously

mentioned, union follows separation, or death. The rainbow is the *cauda pavonis* or peacock's tail—the *omnes colores* (many colors) that are produced as a result of putrefaction. Herein lies the key to understanding the unification of the eight and the lemniscate: In embracing death, we are deathless, for death is the necessary contraction that allows new life to emerge. The fear of death is itself a symptom of horizontal consciousness deprived of the vertical axis and the gnosis of immortality—the body of the resurrection. To die is to be transformed, and to be truly alive we must die every day to who we conceive ourselves to be (see figure 15.5). Only then are we free to create ourselves anew, reborn each day like the Sun, living as the Creator of our own being.

While the Moon is the Mind, Mercury is thought itself. It can be focused as the fire of the lion or the hunting wolf, tricky as the cynocephalus, balanced and clear in its concentration as the ibis, or undulating and transformative as the serpent. We are all capable of accessing the Quaternity of Thoth in our everyday thinking. Circling the square, we unite the four aspects of Hermes within the oneness of the eternal now. When they are merged as one, we are able to open the circle into a spiral that connects us with the greater power of the many-named One, who is not only the guide, but also the gateway and the open fields beyond, spreading infinitely forward and back in the illusion of time.



Fig. 15.5. The Hermes Bird descending into the two-headed dragon's maw of death and regeneration. Eight sages kneel in prayer, framed by ten virtues: cunning, experience, practice, prudence, patience, grace, nature, reason, speculation, and holy living. From Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, 1652.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

MESSAGE OF THE TWIN SERPENTS

The *circulatio* takes on added meaning when applied to the bodily vessel, where the vital pranic energy and cerebrospinal fluid circulate through the staff of Hermes. The caduceus (see figure 5.3) relates to the primary communication systems of the body: the nervous system, the endocrine system, and the cerebrospinal fluid. Mercury is the messenger of the gods, the Spirit, the vital life-force that links the Soul and Body, and his serpent staff is synonymous with the healing staff of Asclepius.

Sushumna, the central staff of the caduceus, is the central nervous system composed of the brain and spinal cord, which controls all communication of sensation and thought in the body, receiving sensory inputs from the peripheral nervous system, and sending motor impulses that stimulate action. The twin serpents *ida* and *pingala* symbolize the two branches of the autonomic nervous system (ANS)—the parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) and sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The ANS controls involuntary body functions like the heartbeat, blood flow, digestion, and respiration.

The SNS activates in times of stress and is associated with the "fight or flight" response, diverting blood flow to the muscles for action, increasing the heart rate and respiration, and activating the production of stress hormones. It is often compared to hitting the gas pedal in a car, compared with the PSNS, which functions like hitting the brakes. The PSNS slows things down, facilitating rest and recovery. These two systems, like the active and passive principles of Sol and Luna, or Sulfur and Mercury, function in opposition to each other, but may be brought to harmony, or homeostasis, through internal alchemy.

The endocrine (glandular) system is directly connected with the chakras. While the nervous system is an electrical communication system, relying on nerve transmission, the endocrine system communicates chemically through hormones. The PSNS and SNS activate the production of hormones in the endocrine system via the hypothalamus, in turn affecting emotions and behavior. This area of the brain is associated with the knob at the top of the caduceus, the seat of ascended consciousness, the wings being the right and left hemispheres of the brain.

As messenger of the gods, Mercury conveys vital information via the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) that circulates through the spinal canal, moving between the sacrum and cranium in a rhythmic, wavelike motion. This fluid is the medium through which Spirit communicates with Matter. The central staff is attuned by consciousness-raising practices that enhance the optimal flow of CSF, such as yoga, meditation, *pranayama*, therapeutic bodywork, and the use of entheogens. Internal alchemy works to direct the flow of vital energies, using the breath, sound, and imagination, to unify opposing principles and activate the sovereign inner god. With intention the sleeping *kundalini* serpent may be guided in its ascent from sacrum to crown, supporting the parasympathetic state and raising awareness to the hypothalamus, which is responsible for "mind over matter" phenomena.



Fig. 15.6. Mercurius with a caduceus in each hand, standing upon a unified wing. On the left stands an alchemist with a sword entwined with a crowned serpent (Sulfur). On the right, an alchemist bears a sword with an eagle (Salt). From Basilius Valentinus, "Clavis II," *The Twelve Keys*, in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum*, 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

In the case of trauma, the disruption to the nervous and endocrine systems can be greatly destabilizing and debilitating. In her book *Rhythms of Recovery*, Dr. Leslie Korn explains how Hermes as psychopomp serves to guide the traumatized Persephone through the underworld from the unconscious to awareness. Transforming the disruption caused by trauma is necessary for healing and regaining a sense of control in life, which the nervous and endocrine systems facilitate. Korn describes it as a journey from victimization to self-awareness, from "sleep" to "awakening," 66

referring both to a spiritual process and the relationship between the circadian rhythm, light, and the pineal gland. 67

While the *Homeric Hymns* describe the caduceus as a golden rod gifted to Hermes from the Sun god, an Orphic myth places the origin of the staff in the trauma of rape. Zeus was forbidden to marry by his mother Rhea (in the role of Demeter), and so resolved to rape her. Rhea transformed herself into a serpent, and Zeus did the same, and together the two serpents intertwined in an indissoluble knot of incestual union. Thus the staff of Hermes was formed with its two coiling serpents, and Persephone was born. Zeus, still a serpent, went on to rape his daughter, who gave birth to Dionysus.⁶⁸

Serpents are often interchangeable with dragons in alchemical imagery, as in figure 15.7 in which the two principles are intertwined yet pulling strongly in opposing directions toward Sol and Luna. The two dragons stand in tenuous balance upon the orb of the world, indicating that the unconscious opposition has yet to be resolved. Often the descent into the depths involves confrontation with dangerous aspects of the psyche in the form of dragons, wolves, lions, dogs, and serpents, all of which are related to Mercury, but as Maier asserts, "a Dragon always denotes Mercury, whether he be fixed or volatile." The winged and wingless dragons are the fixed and the volatile aspects, or matter and spirit, that must be reconciled.

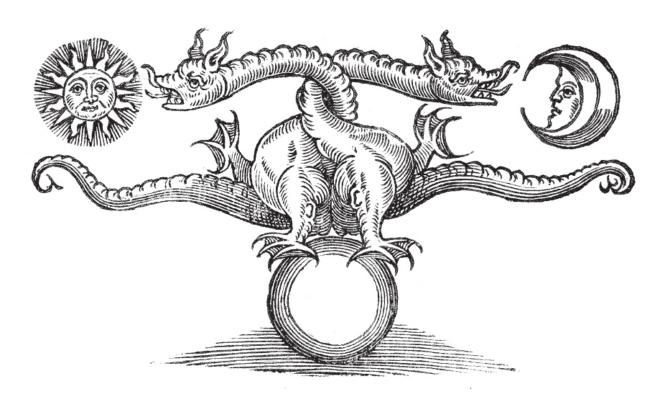


Fig. 15.7. The Mercurial dragons of Sol and Luna. From Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum, 1652.*Courtesy of Science History Institute.

The circular serpent-dragon ouroboros that devours its own tail encapsulates the eternal cycles of life, death, and regeneration, as well as hellish cycles of self-consuming torment. The snake sheds its skin as it sheds its life, only to be reborn again and again from the same immortal energy. As Campbell points out, "There is something tremendously terrifying about life when you look at it that way. And so the serpent carries in itself the sense of both the fascination and the terror of life." A closed circle is "the world of the eternal return, the world where 'there is nothing new under the sun.'... It is nothing other than cosmic hell." The same immortal energy.

In the sixth figure of *The Alchemical Book of Lambspring* the dragon devours his own venomous tail, producing a healing balm within its own body. This terrible dragon, which "dwells in the forest," or the body, must be slain. Thereby its venom is transmuted into "highest medicine." In the *Aurelia Occulta* Mercury proclaims himself to be "the poison-dripping dragon, who is everywhere and can be cheaply had." Dragons guard the

treasure and the alchemical gold, living in caverns and depths of the earth where the hero must descend to be reborn. They represent the devouring aspect of the unconscious, as well as the flaming breath of transformation. Through confronting the depths of ourselves, the "venom" of the unconscious is transmuted into a powerful healing medicine of gnosis that pours forth within.

The relationship between emotion and thought is a key aspect of the interrelated functions of the nervous system and endocrine system. Both emotions and thoughts can be "venomous." Emotions relate to water and thoughts to air; indeed the Mercurial dragon may be both water and air, fixed and volatile, wingless and winged. Emotions, heated up in the athanor of the body, rise like vapors into the mind, like moisture is carried upward into the atmosphere. They spin into clouds—thoughts—which then under pressure, produce storms and downpours of emotional expression. If there are blockages in the chakras these emotions may simply cycle back down into the lower energy body, where they crystallize within, just as moisture does in the earth. The great pressure of physical matter acts upon them, hardening them into minerals and metals, and slowly pushing them to the surface. This is the root of many illnesses: hardened emotions longing to be felt and released. When the chakras are open, the emotions rise to the mind, yet if the ape-mind is not tamed, thoughts and emotion can erupt into an overwhelming tempest that wreaks havoc on the body. The alchemist, recognizing the body as a microcosm of atmospheric and earthly cycles of transformation, learns how to properly circulate the air and the water in repetitive cycles that increasingly purify and refine their substance, reconciling them into union. As Patanjali teaches, yoga, which means "union," "is the cessation of the turnings of thought." Thus the spirit separates their true identity from the circulations of thought and emotion, instead uniting with still and present objective awareness.

The lemniscate of the magician denotes a state of "concentration without effort" and the "eternity of rhythm"—specifically the rhythm of the nervous system and the ability of the magician to bring harmony to the "oscillations of the mental substance," bringing it to a state of stillness, silence, and rest so that concentration is optimized. The Magus is attributed to the twelfth path on the Tree of Life that connects Kether to

Binah, for the magician and the messenger alike transmit the Divine Spirit from above to below.



Fig. 15.8. The dragon, devouring its own venom, produces the highest medicine.

From *The Alchemical Book of Lambspring,* in the *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum, 1678.*Courtesy of Science History Institute.

DRINKING THE VIRGIN'S MILK OF COSMIC ILLUSION

Maia, mother of Hermes, was the Roman fertility goddess and the "Earthgoddess as Crone."⁷⁷ It was in her honor that the month of May was named, for Maia is literally "she who brings increase" and is associated with the springtime. She is the "good mother," the first mother, the prima mater of the philosopher's stone, from whose breast the lac virginis flows. This "virgin's milk" is that which, when combined with the acetum fontum or "spring of vinegar"—the fertilizing rains of Zeus-pater—produces the aqua vitae or "waters of Mercury." As an agent of the albedo (whitening), the lac virginis is purifying in its effects; according to the Lexicon of Alchemy the "pure and uncontaminated virgin" is another name for the prima materia and she "remains pure and unimpregnated, notwithstanding that she bears children. She is a most extraordinary mother, who slays her husband and offspring, and revivifies them by means of her breasts."80 The lac virginis is the "Mercurial Water, the Dragon's Tail; it washes and coagulates without any manual labour; it is the Mercury of the Philosophers, Lunar and Solar Sap, out of catholic earth and water."81 Milk is cross-culturally considered a symbol of immortality, from the Indian Vedas and ancient Egyptian rituals in the tomb of Osiris, to the Orphic hymns and Celtic lore <u>82</u>

The Sanskrit word $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$, a homophone of Maia, is the cosmic illusion of the phenomenal, ever-changing reality that exists like a veil over the absolute reality (brahman), which is the true, unchanging and eternal reality. $M\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ is also "magic" and is analogous to Maia in the sense that the trickster magician is born of illusion. In addition to the illusory $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ there is a creative, instrumental aspect that can be understood like Indra's net, which Aaron Cheak calls "a symbol of divine superiority, and hence sovereignty."83 The word $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ derives from the Sanskrit root $m\bar{a}$, meaning "to measure," which Cheak suggests is related to the controlling measures of sovereign divinity and its establishment of order through creative and formative principles. Thus $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ relates to the manifestation of the invisible into the visible, and the delineation and appearance of forms. 84 $M\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ is the power of creation itself; like the dual nature of Mercury it may be used for good or evil depending on how it is employed. This creative energy is

embodied by the goddess Māyā, who is the "potentiality and maternal measure of the world." She is the first expression of the undifferentiated consciousness of the Supreme, at first a part of the totality and then gradually experienced as separate from it, perceived by Mind in its "otherness"—a process equivalent to creation itself. It is through the illusion of $m\bar{a}y\bar{a}$ that the Absolute experiences itself and comes to know itself, and all existence is dependent on the stream of creativity that Māyā engenders. In the following hymn from the *Atharva-Veda*, the milk of the goddess is depended on for sustenance by the Asuras (demons):

She rose. The Asuras saw her. They called her. Their cry was, "Come, O Māyā, come thou hither"!!

Her cow was Virochana Prahradi. Her milking vessel was a pan of iron.

Dvimurdha Artvya milked this Māyā.

The Asuras depend for life on Māyā for their sustenance.

One who knows this, becomes a fit supporter.87

The Will of the magus is born from the first mother and purified by the virgin's milk, the changing, fluid, temporal reality that provides us with the sustenance upon which we live and through which we discover the unchanging, eternal reality. Purification, then, need not be by any other means than through life itself; through engaging with the illusion in a conscious, meaningful way as creative, self-expressive points of consciousness upon Indra's net. There was a net said to exist in the Egyptian underworld; the deceased was obliged to learn the names of every part of the net—poles, ropes, weights, cords, hooks—if he had any chance to escape from it. Mead suggests that the various parts of the net refer to the anatomy of the subtle body, and learning the names meant rebirth and remembrance of the true inner, deathless nature. The net was the engine of fate, which must be transmuted from a net of enmeshment to a net with which to catch "food," or true spiritual nourishment. 88

Vishuddhi is Sanskrit for "purification" and so the throat chakra acts like a filter. Its position in the neck between the third and fourth cervical vertebrae indicates that it is filtering the energies from above and below.

There is much interference generated in the lower chakras; the illusion of personal desires obscures our vision from a greater plan unfolding. These desires may ultimately be nothing more than desert mirages that, while convincing, dissolve as we approach them in time. As energy rises from the four lower elemental polarities and reaches the hermaphroditic throat, it splits into the ultimate pair, Sol and Luna. While the sword of Mars cuts through illusions, liberating us from attachments, the higher aspirations of Mind—transmitted through the mercurial Æther—purify and inspire us to surrender to a higher ordering of events directed by the upper chakras. When faced with the inevitable disappointments that arise along our paths we have a choice to either accept them with grace and find our footing, or continue stumbling in our efforts to reach that ever-receding mirage.

In the same way that mercury must be purified into its "philosophic" form before the work of creating the stone may begin, the spiritual *magnum opus* requires a purification of the Mercurial archetype—meaning the Mind and all of our thoughts, our speech, and our ability to hear the voice of Spirit. In the lab, mercury is washed with rainwater and cleansed with salt and vinegar, and then "reanimated" by the addition of pure native gold that has been ground to a fine powder, ⁸⁹ a conjunction of female and male principles. They are digested together for a period of six months, during which time the female Mercury is inseminated by the seed of Gold. ⁹⁰ In our spiritual and creative work, the process is the same. We purify the mind, and animate it with divine consciousness, so that every thought, word, action, and deed is imbued with the subtle essence of gold. Just as in the lab, this process takes time, but will result in a living, animated Mercury within us.

For the Indian alchemists, the alchemical elixir was synonymous with the immortality of the body, the aim of tantric yoga. Thus the alchemical operations translated to a transmutation of the earthly body into a divine body, thereby freeing the Spirit. Gold had to be purified and "fixed" with Mercury before it could be absorbed. In the alchemical text *Raseśvara-Darśana*, meaning "Mercurial system" or "science of mercury," Mercury is the means by which the soul is conveyed beyond its transmigratory cycles. Emphasis is placed on the purification of the body by the application of purified quicksilver, for emancipation depends on the health of the body. Having thus acquired a divine body, "The light of pure

intelligence shines forth. . . . Which, seated between the two eyebrows, illumines the universe, like fire, or lightning, or the sun." Mercury is further identified with the supreme self, which preserves the soul from "the terrors of metempsychosis," and liberates it from "the enveloping illusion." Enlivened by the Holy Spirit, the breath of the Supreme, the body is lightened and dispersed, its boundaries no longer fixed but fluid, dissolving the boundaries between within and without. The structures holding it loosen and break down, softened by the waters of the Spirit that flow forth from Heaven and immerse us in a flood of gnosis.



The Moon Reflections of the Unknowable



Moon promised to pour light upon the after-the-sun course, and said she had already given birth to Fear, and Silence, and also Sleep, and Memory—a thing that would turn out to be most useful for them.

—EXCERPTS BY STOBÆUS (25.17), FROM MEAD, THRICE-GREATEST HERMES

THE GLEAMING MIRROR OF THE MOON reflects back to us that which is unseen by the light of day, speaking in symbols and through dreams, fantasies, and memories. By the soft white glow of the Moon we measure time, and through the lunar sphere we develop the "function of molding and increasing bodies (*phytikon*)," the lunar powers of the imagination through which we create in the likeness of our internal images, manifesting thought into tangible form. The Moon is both male and female, at once the spermatic force inseminating the solar egg, and the lunar egg receiving the fertilizing rays of the Sun. Light and dark, birth and death,

inspiration and madness—the Moon inhabits the liminal space between the above and below, a source of fertility and regeneration as much as it is of corruption and madness. From the cup of the Moon ($M\bar{e}n\bar{e}$) we draw "sleep, in sooth" (Stob. 24),² and we are drawn into the depths of the unconscious, for the Moon is the guardian of nocturnal wisdom. In her silvery light we encounter the priestess, the oracle, the prophet, and the witch—all that is hidden behind the Moon's misty veil.

Our closest celestial neighbor and the brightest object in the sky apart from the Sun, the Moon glows with a gentle "counterfeit light," a reflection of the Sun, illuminating and revealing that which is otherwise enshrouded in darkness. With its cyclical disappearance the Moon resonates with themes of death and rebirth that have inspired the human imagination since time immemorial. Roughly 15,000 years before the development of agriculture, humans were memorizing and using lunar cycles for practical purposes. Its influence upon humanity is equal to if not surpassing that of the Sun's, for the Moon not only makes its appearance known day and night, but it exerts a gravitational pull upon the lifegiving tides of the seas and upon human physiology, directing the flow of menstrual blood and cycles of procreation.

While not technically a planet, the Moon is the last in the descending order of the wandering stars. As a satellite the Moon is the constant and sole companion of Earth, orbiting in a period of twenty-seven days at a distance of 239,000 miles. Because the Moon's rotational timing is synced up with the Earth's, it rotates at the same rate that it takes to orbit the planet, and thus we only ever see one side of the Moon, leading to the idea of there being a dark side of the Moon and adding to its mystery and relationship to the unconscious. Its dusty and desolate cratered surface reveals a long history of violent collisions with asteroids, comets, and meteoroids that have left a layer of gray dust and rocky debris behind, known as the lunar regolith. From our vantage point on Earth, we see the craters, *maria* ("seas"), as darkened areas on the surface contrasted with the lighter highlands, creating shapes imagined to resemble variously a man, a rabbit, or a toad.

How much we see of the Moon depends upon where it is in its cycle of lunar phases and its position in relation to the Earth and Sun, ranging from complete invisibility at the new moon, to the full and brilliant white disk of the full moon. From one new moon to the next is a period of twenty-nine and a half days, which is broken down into four, eight, or sixteen phases. The apparent disappearance and reappearance of the Moon has been interpreted as a symbolic process of birth, death, resurrection, and cycles of generation. The waxing and waning of life, like the waxing and waning of the Moon, may be considered the opposing principles of yang and yin, which work to continually balance one another. While waxing, the Moon is more yang, which may be considered more masculine, active, and expansive, while the waning Moon is more yin, which is to say feminine, contractive, and passive.

In ancient Egypt lunar eclipses were associated with Typhon, who some refer to as the Earth's shadow and who represents all that is dark and destructive in nature. Just as Osiris fell into his coffin by the trickery of Seth, the Moon fell into the shadow of the Earth at the lunar eclipse, turning a sinister red color. Alternatively, during a solar eclipse, the Sun is occulted by the Moon, imagined to be the terrible serpent, Apep (Apophis), devouring the Sun and bringing darkness and chaos to the world.

The Moon is a warm, moist, phlegmatic, humidifying influence that rules over the watery aspects of both individual bodies and the body of the Earth. In his *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy writes that the Moon softens and putrefies, and is moderately warming from the light it receives from the Sun. The Moon rules the water sign of the Crab, Cancer, the cardinal sign of summer that imparts maternal and feminine qualities of nurturance, generation, and security. In the body the Moon relates to the left side, particularly the left eye, as well as the breasts, stomach, belly, bladder, womb, spleen, membranes, and marrow. Monday is assigned to the Moon, from the Old English *mōndæg*, the "day of the moon." Alchemically Luna relates to the bright shining gray of silver, and to the elements Water and Earth combined as the third principle, Salt, the structured form of thought.

In climates where the Sun's unmitigated heat may lend a more dangerous character to the Sun, as in Egypt and India, the Moon is a beacon of light and source of generation. In India the Moon is envisioned as a chalice within which abides the elixir of immortality, *amrita*, the drink of the gods, related etymologically to the Greek *ambrosia*. As the conductor of the tides and ruler of water, the Moon holds sway over all of life, the elixir manifesting itself as dew, sap, milk, and blood. The Chinese tell of a

lunar dew collected from the Moon in a large shell, and the Immortals of the island of Ho-chu that drink the air and dew. ¹⁰ The interaction between feminine-yin energy of the Moon's moisture, and the masculine-yang energy of the Sun's dryness are the opposites that compose the Tao, the eternal and f luctuating order of the universe. ¹¹

The Moon is referred to in the second arcanum of the tarot, the High Priestess, who embodies the light of Isis and the veil of the mysteries. The priestess stands at the threshold of the unknowable. As Crowley writes, "She is the truth behind the veil of light" and "the soul of light." She illuminates the inner eye, Ajna, or Third Eye, located in the center of the forehead and often associated with the pineal gland, *9 which regulates our experience of and receptivity to spiritual experiences. It is also called the brow center and considered the transmission point for consciousness entering the physical body, the "Eye of the Soul." Through the union of the Sun and Moon, the Eye of the Soul is opened. This small pineconeshaped gland is the primary producer of melatonin, which affects our mood, helping to calm the mind and body, and it plays a primary role in the sleepwake cycle. Melatonin is said to be the hormone of darkness; its production by the pineal is inhibited by light and stimulated by darkness. In addition to melatonin, the pineal also produces the psychoactive substances pinoline and DMT.¹⁴ The relationship between mystical experiences—out of body, near death, alien abductions, angelic visions—and DMT is demonstrated by the studies of Rick Strassman, who suggests that DMT is the spirit molecule linking the soul with the body. 15 According to Bruce Burger, "the pineal gland is the link that resonates with the primary energy of the source." 16 It is the knob at the top of the caduceus, the staff of Hermes, while the two wings are the left and right hemispheres of the brain (see figure 5.3). Ruled by the Moon, this chakra is the center relating to perception beyond the physical senses, psychic abilities, "second sight," intuition, premonitions, and oracles.

THE MAN IN THE MOON

In the journey that the Moon has taken through the human imagination, this ever-changing satellite has been conceived of as both male and female, linguistically and mythically. Western alchemical and astrological

symbolism typically refers to the Moon as *Luna* (Latin, feminine), and words for the Moon in English, French, Italian, and Greek are feminine; however the Teutonic (Germanic) languages are opposite. The Moon in German is *der mond*, masculine; in Old Norse, the masculine, *máni*; and in Sanskrit the masculine, *mâs*. Cultures the world over have assigned a masculine gender to the Moon; for the Scandinavians the Sun and Moon were sister and brother, respectively, and the Chinese refer to the old man in the Moon, *Yue-lao*. The Moon was considered a man according to the astrological mythology of the African bushman and to the Khasias of the Himalaya mountains, and myths of a male Moon exist in places as distant as Greenland and Panama. 18

The Babylonian Moon god, Sin, a contraction of *Su'en*, was "the lord of wisdom," correspondent to the Sumerian Nanna(r), sometimes combined as Nanna-Suen. Sin was the god of wisdom and father of the Sun god, ¹⁹ and was usually depicted with or as a recumbent crescent (*uskaru*), ²⁰ relating to the horned bull that generated life, regulated time, and had oracular powers. ²¹ A gentle, reliable, and merciful god, Sin was thought of as self-regenerating and associated with fertility and the abundance of crops, sometimes playing the role of midwife. ²² The Phrygian god, Mên, a male lunar deity worshipped throughout Asia Minor, thought to be associated with the Persian Moon-god, Mao, ²³ bore the points of the crescent on his shoulders and was associated with fertility, healing, and punishment of wrongdoers. He holds a pinecone (*patera*) in his right hand, considered to be a symbol of immortality, enlightenment, and the pineal gland. ²⁴

In India the god Shiva, the Transformer, is related to the Moon and bears the crescent as his emblem. The Moon-god Chandra, lord of fertility, plants, and vegetation, was given 108 names in the sacred text, *Ashtottara Shatanamavali of Lord Chandra*, including "the One endowed with a rabbit," "the Storehouse of nectar," "the immortal One," and "the Knower of everything." Sacred in the Dharmic religions, the number 108 is a mathematical key to the cosmic geometry of the universe—the mean distance from Earth to the Moon is 108 times the Moon's radius is 1080 miles); the distance from Earth to the Sun is 108 times the Sun's diameter; and the diameter of the Sun is 108 times the diameter of Earth. These cosmic proportions are reflected in the microcosm

in the 108 chakras of the energy body, 25 and 108 is the atomic mass of silver.

The Egyptians considered the Sun and Moon to be the eyes of heaven, or the right and left eyes of Horus. The Moon was the son of the sky-god Nut and brother of the Sun. ²⁶ Called "the Sun shining at night," the Moon was symbolized by a disc upon a crescent, ²⁷ associated with the male deities Thoth, Khonsu, Osiris, and Iah (Aah). Much has already been said about Thoth's association with the Moon. He assimilated an earlier Moon god, Iah, or Aah, ²⁸ by which he attained the name Aah-Tehuti, the "maker of eternity and creator of everlastingness." As Aah he was depicted as a mummy, adorned with the crescent and full moon and pictured atop the symbol of Mayet (*ma'at*), the ostrich feather of truth and justice. While Thoth represents all of the phases of the Moon, Aah-Tehuti was specifically associated with the new moon, the traditional basis for lunar calculations. The wedjat (eye) of Thoth, however, was a symbol of the full moon. ³¹

According to Plutarch, Hermes (Thoth) won while playing draughts with the Moon a certain number of periods of light, composing from them the 5 intercalated days that were added to the 360 days of the Egyptian year. Thoth had many lunar epithets, including the "Silver Sun," "Lord of heaven," and "bull of the heavens." He was commonly depicted with a cutting weapon symbolizing the sickle moon. Lunar-Thoth regulated the passage of time; he was the "lord of time" and "reckoner of years," as well as a prophet who sees and foretells the future. In some respects Thoth was the Moon itself, and when the Sun-god Ra ascended into the stars with the separation of heaven and earth, Thoth returned light to humanity through the Moon. In other respects Thoth is the guardian and protector of the Moon, as when he finds and returns the left eye of Horus, representing the healing of the eclipsed or dark moon and restoring it to "full" health.

Khonsu, derived from the root *khens* meaning "to travel, to move about, to run," was known as the "traveler," looking over those traveling at night. He was Lord of Truth, depicted as a young man with legs bound like a mummy and adorned with the disk and lunar crescent. Khonsu was likened to a virile and powerful bull as the new moon, and as the full moon an emasculated bull. 41 Khonsu was a bringer of fertility and wore the

menat, symbol of virility, with powers extending to giving oracles and the making of destinies. $\frac{42}{}$

The death and resurrection of Osiris was related to the phases of the Moon, which represented life and death; the fourteen days of the waning moon corresponded to the fourteen missing pieces of Osiris's body. 43 It was also said that Osiris either reigned for twenty-eight years or lived to be twenty-eight years old, approximating the number of days in the lunar cycle. Osiris assimilated the Moon-god Iah in the Late Period as Osiris-Iah, depicted with the disk and crescent upon his crown, and was associated with Apis, sacred bull and fertility god, assimilating him into the combined form of *Usar-Hape*, whom the Greeks called *Osorapis*. 44 As Apis, Osiris was associated with the beginning of spring, when on the new moon in the month of Phamenoth the Egyptians celebrated a festival they named "Osiris's coming to the Moon." In the Osirian mysteries the body of Osiris was placed in a coffin shaped like a celestial cow, from which he could be reborn in her womb. 46

LUNAR GODDESSES

Of the female Egyptian lunar deities we find the cat-headed Bast (Bastet). While representing the Sun as a gentle and protective power, Bast also personified the Moon, 47 presumably or partly on account of the correlation between cats—particularly their eyes—and the Moon. She was associated with both parents of the Moon-god Khonsu and was considered to preside over pregnant women in the birth chamber, aided by Khonsu. 48 She was often shown holding the sistrum, a musical instrument like a rattle used to ward off darkness, particularly Typhon with his deleterious effects. Plutarch describes the sistrum as being topped by a cat with a human face, with metal loops that symbolize the orbit of the Moon. He recounted that the sistrum represented the need for all things to be shaken up in ceaseless motion, by which he meant "woken up" and "agitated" from torpidity. The faces of Isis and Nephthys are found on the bottom of the sistrum on either side, representing generation and corruption as the dual nature of the Moon 49

While Isis, "great of magic" and goddess of fertility and generation, has inherent lunar qualities, it wasn't until the third century BCE that the

correlation between Isis and the Moon became prominent, with the writings of the Egyptian priest Manetho. The lunar cow horns and Sun disk that she wears were adopted during the New Kingdom when she became associated with Hathor. As the mother of Horus, Isis was sometimes called "the mother of the Moon," and as the sister-wife of lunar Osiris, Isis was also wed to the Moon. She came to be worshipped as a Moon goddess by the Druids of Britain and Gaul on account of the Moon's influence over the waters of the Earth. 51

The virginal goddess Artemis, related to Hecate, the Persian Anahita, and the Thracian Moon-goddess Bendis, is the lunar Maiden of the Silver Bow and the goddess of hunting, wild animals, childbirth, and unmarried women. Artemis was the daughter of Zeus and Leto and sister of Apollo the Sun god. She was identified with the Roman Diana, originally a woodland goddess who was called Diana *Lucifera*, "the Light Bringing"; Diana *Omnivaga*, "wide-wandering"; ⁵² and the Mother of the World. ⁵³ Artemis plays contradictory roles, protecting mothers and children, as well as bringing sudden illness to both women and girls. She provides a stark contrast and alternative to the sexuality and pleasures of Aphrodite, defending the chaste and showing no mercy to those women that succumb to love's taming qualities or the passions of the body. She is the lady of the hills, wandering alone in the mountains and delighting in solitude. Aphrodite has no power over her; many myths entail the thwarted attempts to seduce the goddess, a sure way to incite her wrath.

Selene: Immortality and the Gateway of the Moon

Selene was the Greek Titan goddess of the Moon, daughter of Hyperion and Theia, and sister of the Sun (*Helios*) and Dawn (*Eos*). In other accounts she is the daughter of Helios. Presiding over the months, Selene is called *Mene* (Moon, month). While she was part of a lunar triad composed of Artemis-Hekate-Selene, it was Selene that was the true personification of the Moon, often riding in a chariot drawn by two horses or bulls. Selene, from *selas*, or "light," is also known by the name Phoebe, the "Lunarbright," "pure," and one of the twin Messinian princesses, horse goddesses known as Leucippides. Selene was sometimes called Hilaeira, the other Leucippide whose name means "softly shining." The Moon's nourishing dew was

personified as Selene's daughter Ersa ("dew") who replenished the earth and stimulated growth.

Selene fell in love with a mortal youth, a shepherd of great beauty named Endymion, who Zeus put into a state of perpetual sleep in which he would neither age nor pass away. It was during the Moon's dark phase that Selene would visit Endymion in a cave on Mount Latmus. As a shepherd, Endymion was depicted with Selene in stunning relief upon a third-century sarcophagus (see figure 16.1). Endymion is shown reclining, face up as though falling asleep, with a female figure above him holding the elixir of immortality and poppies by which he falls asleep, while Selene draws toward her beloved, descending from her chariot. Endymion maintains his union with the immortal goddess by falling into deathless sleep.

Poppies, used as offerings to the dead, represent peace and sleep but also death by their blood-red color, much like the ruddy shadow that overtakes the moon during a lunar eclipse. This is also the red of the final stage of the alchemical *opus*, for that is the surrender and death of the old self and birth as the immortal self. For what other than a perpetual union with the world of dreams, from which we die and are born each night and dawn, is the true experience of immortality? That the Moon is so frequently seen as the vessel from which flows the sacred elixir is indicative of the Moon's power in the practice of magic, receiving visions, and awakening the true imagination.



Fig. 16.1. Marble sarcophagus with the myth of Selene and Endymion, third century.

Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the Tree of Life, the Moon is the ninth sephirah Yesod, "Foundation," and it stands like a gateway between Earth (Malkuth, "Kingdom") and the elemental and heavenly spheres, through which the initiate must pass to attain higher states of consciousness. Thus she also rules over the sublunary spirits and spirits of the earth. Poppies were related to the earth in Eleusinian symbolism, signifying the harvest and the poppy-goddess Demeter. By the light of the Moon we imagine what will be harvested in time from the unmanifest world before form. Endymion's sleep is an awakening to the immortal self—a resurrection into a waking dream, where the lines between the real and imaginary, or unmanifest, dissolve away. Hence one of the names of Yesod is "Treasure House of Images," for it is the keeper of the image of all existent things and holds the power to modify and refine them. Through the Moon the astral realm opens, and the power of generation is revealed in the creative process, which allows us to affect changes in the physical world through the imagination.

As an intermediary between the material and immaterial, the Moon is the forerunner of the seven worlds, the "instrument of nature" and the "transmuter of its lower matter," circling midway between the immortal and mortal realms of heaven and earth $(CH\ 11.7)$. The Moon is thus the gateway to the higher celestial realms wherein the initiate begins to access the immortal, indestructible, and true Self.

Hecate: Madness, Magic, and the Dark Passage

Though bright and nurturing, the dark side of the Moon incites lunacy, a well-known association reflected in the common saying that "it must be a full Moon" when unusual or mysterious things happen at night. Lunacy, from the root word *luna*, originally referred to a state of madness caused by changes of the Moon, and *lunatic* is likely derived from the late Latin *lunaticus*, meaning "moon-struck." When the unconscious floods the conscious mind it can destabilize an individual and lead to madness. In her reply to the pleas of Dionysus, who was being persecuted by Pentheus, Mene replies, "Equally with Bakkhos (Bacchus) I rule distracted madness. I am the Bakkhic Mene, not alone because in heaven I turn the months, but because I command madness and excite lunacy." There is an evil to the Moon, generating no light of her own other than what is projected upon her.

Projections of the mind, inherently unconscious and ominous externalizations, are at once alien and subtly familiar; their purpose is to awaken us to unconscious contents hidden within the complexities of the Self.

The dark, deadly, or devouring mother is embodied in the form of the chthonic lunar goddess, Hecate (Roman *Trivia*), a nightmarish female figure and personification of lunacy and nightmares. Hecate is associated with childbirth, the crossroads, as well as witchcraft, magic, ghosts, and the summoning of the dead. According to Hesiod she was the daughter of Asteria and Perses and honored by Zeus above all, bestowing upon her honor in the heavens among the deathless gods and powers in heaven, on earth, and in the "unfruitful sea"; those who pray to her are granted many favors. Identified with virginal Artemis, Hecate is sometimes depicted in a knee-length skirt and holding two flaming torches. Her animal familiars are the black she-dog, the polecat, mares, and she-wolves.

Like the three-headed hell hound, Cerberus, Hecate sometimes has three bodies and three heads, captured in the epithet *Brimo Trimorphos* (three-formed Hekate),⁶³ simultaneously symbolic of the three phases of the Moon, three phases of life, and three levels of heaven, earth, and hell.⁶⁴ This also relates to her role as goddess of the crossroads, forked roads, and junctions of three roads, and times in life when decisions must be made, turns for better or worse, or new directions chosen and followed. Jung perceived the crossroads as a unification of the opposites, and forks in the road a parting or division—like the mother that unifies, and from who we must separate.⁶⁵

At the crossroads of the known and the unknown, the dark mother represents the dangerous aspect of the unconscious that arises in times of separation, like the earth breaking open to reveal the unknown terrors that lay hidden therein, pressing through and manifesting in forms of lunacy and psychosis in order that they may be assimilated and transformed. There is a certain amount of the Moon's divine madness that may be imbibed, a creative immersion so to speak in the absurd realities that lie just outside of consensus reality. The artist, the magician, and the alchemist know well the fine line that must be respected, and how much of the Moon's dark elixir may be drunk before reality begins to dissolve or shatter like a mirror. Such

moonsickness floods the conscious mind, and for the creative process, can be richly generative, but only in proper doses.

As a goddess of childbirth, Hecate represents the intimate relationship between darkness and creative generation, and the ebb and flow of creative tides. It is all too easy to forget that life and death go handin-hand, and that the seed requires the darkness in order to germinate. Blocks in creativity may be characterized by a frustrated mania in which the sea of unconscious inspiration floods the imagination, but the means for bringing them to birth evades consciousness. Such a sickness cannot be alleviated by force, any more than a mother can decide when a child will be born. The waters will break in their own time, but in the meanwhile, developing patience and fortitude is required, for the only way out is through.

In the descent into the underworld, we meet with the black she-dog of Hecate, formerly the Queen of Troy before being turned into a dog as punishment for murder. Dogs, apt to devour and destroy indiscriminately, yet also connected with healing and guidance, have a natural affinity to the underworld, hell, and death: the hellhound Cerberus; the cynocephalic baboon of Thoth; Garm, the horrifying hound that stood at the gates of Niflheim; and the psychopomp jackal-god Anubis of the Egyptians, guiding the souls of the deceased into the Duat. Dogs, wolves, and jackals shared related symbology in ancient Egypt. Early on associations between the jackal and the dead arose from the fact that this animal made its home in the deserts and mountains where the Egyptians built their tombs and buried their dead. Plutarch compares Anubis with Hecate because they both possess the ability to see by day and by night. 67

In alchemical symbolism dogs take on another role as the dual natures of Sol and Luna in a violent mating ritual that precedes union. The royal couple are depicted as two dogs or else a dog and a wolf, in a sexually charged fight where the animalistic passions are extreme and devouring, resulting in a union of opposing libidinal forces of *anima* and *animus*, Eros and Logos. The pair are identified as a wolf from the east and a dog from the west in *The Alchemical Book of Lambspring*, though they are of the same stock, full of jealousy, rage, and madness. 68



Fig. 16.2. A battle of opposing principles in the form of a wolf from the east and a dog from the west. From *The Alchemical Book of Lambspring,* in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum,* 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

In their fury the two canines kill each other to produce a great poison, but their resurrection produces "the Great and Precious Medicine." The two dogs are the Soul and the Spirit, and their death is the mortification of

the Body (Luna). On a spiritual level the *mortificatio* initiates the underworld journey, guided by the dual chthonic canines of east and west, pictured on the eighteenth arcanum, the Moon, as two howling dogs, or in the Thoth Tarot as twin Anubis forms guarding two towers, between which lies the narrow path the aspirant must walk to find the way to the solar lands. In this infernal region awaits the madness and sorcery of Hecate, ghosts and nightmares, the intoxicating poison of illusion and deception, and all of the dread horrors of the night. Mercifully, Anubis guides the soul through the underworld, that it may reconcile the two halves of its being—Soul and Spirit—and be reborn, for when brought to union they produce the reconciling medicine, the elixir of immortality, the regenerative moisture of the Moon that resurrects the dismembered body.

WHERE THE UNICORN HIDES

While many cultures imagine a Great Rabbit in the face of the Moon, some see a toad. In the Pacific Northwest the Salish have a story about a toad that jumped to the Moon as it was fleeing the amorous pursuit of a wolf, and in China the toad in the Moon is associated with the goddess Chang'e after she drank the elixir of immortality. A common though often subtle symbol in alchemy is the Black Toad, symbolizing the *prima materia*, both a dark, whirling mass of stupefying confusion and the realm of pure, imaginative potential where all things are possible. In seeking the toad, we are led to the unicorn, *monoceros*, for it is said that unicorns like to hide in the most difficult to reach mountains, deep in the dark caverns and lairs of venomous toads and other loathsome creatures, for what better place to hide something sacred than in the least likely and undesirable places? Many have said the unicorn may be found in Abyssinia (Ethiopia), particularly in the "Mountains of the Moon," a legendary mountain range thought to be the source of the Nile. 11

In the same way that we project ourselves into Luna's silvery mirror, our ideas of the sacred are projected upon the unicorn. The unicorn will flee from all except the Virgin, for the horn discerns impurity of the minutest degree. With their shimmering white coat, suggestive of the Moon's brilliance, unicorns symbolize virginity and purity, relating to the *albedo*. By the principle of like attracts like, the horn draws to itself only that which

is as pure as itself, repelling things contrary. It is for this reason that unicorns have been said to be useful in expelling poisons from water by dipping their horn therein. According to Manly P. Hall, "the unicorn was adopted by the Mysteries as a symbol of the illumined spiritual nature of the initiate, the horn with which it defends itself being the flaming sword of the spiritual doctrine against which nothing can prevail."

The lunar unicorn, with silver in its hair, is the mythical animal par excellence for the art of imagination projected outward in the process of manifestation, the powers of *Ajna*, the Third Eye. The phallic nature of the horn emerging from the center of the forehead and pointing to the heavens represents both fertility and the unification of vision toward the higher realms. Notably the clitoral resemblance of the toad and the phallic white horn represent the black generative force of earth below, and the spiritual eye of heaven above. Together they stand for the transmutation of the *prima* materia to the materia ultima, the perfected matter and the completion of the alchemical work. Thus the unicorn embodies the spiritual, singular focus of the mind, which leads to enlightenment. As the upper reflection of the sacral center, Svadhisthana, the Third Eye receives the creative energies stimulated by Jupiter's electricity, which are brought upward to be projected into reality. In Jupiter's symbol, the lunar crescent over the cross of matter symbolizes "mind over matter" and the power of the imagination to form reality. It is in this sphere that the mind transcends the body, and hence the crescent sits above the cross of matter, the cross that Christ had to bear that we all have to bear—in taking on the flesh. Certainly, the lunar mind is connected to the creative impulse below through the stream of the mercurial waters, which flow through the axis mundi, the Tree of the World, or the sushumna nadi.

Luna and the unicorn are both referred to as a symbol of the Mercurial Spirit. In this context a unicorn is depicted alongside a stag in *The Alchemical Book of Lambspring* (see fig. 16.3), wherein the stag is the Soul (*Anima*), the unicorn is the Spirit (*Spiritus*), and the forest where they meet is the Body (*Corpus*). In the accompanying text we are advised that the master "leads and restrains them" by art to remain together in the body, and thereby attain the "golden flesh."



Fig. 16.3. A stag and a unicorn are hidden together in the forest. From *The Alchemical Book of Lambspring,* in *Musaeum Hermeticum Reformatum Et Amplificatum,* 1678.

Courtesy of Science History Institute.

Considered a hermaphroditic symbol, the unicorn is related both to the feminine spirit, equated with the Virgin Mary and the conception of the

Holy Spirit, while the erect horn is a masculine, penetrating force and spiritual potency of the mind. In China, the male unicorn is called *ch' i* and the female *lin*, while the unicorn itself is referred to by their conjunction as *ch' i-lin*. Chevalier and Gheerbrandt point out that the unicorn transcends sexuality altogether, and in the Middle Ages was equated with "the Word of God made flesh within the womb of the virgin Mary." Truly, the unconscious mind is the womb and receiver for the seed, or word of God. In the fecund and rich *prima materia*, where all possibilities exist, the singular focus of the imagination, the word of God, is implanted and grows in its own period of gestation.

Like the Moon, the unicorn is not to be considered entirely pure, despite the emphasis on this quality in so much of the lore surrounding its mystery. According to Odell Shepard, both the unicorn's horn and the Moon, once thought to be of the purest nature, came to be considered as inherently poisonous. $\frac{76}{1}$ It is said in the *Physiologus Graecus* that the unicorn is "evilly disposed towards man," and was referred to by St. Basil as a demon that "plotteth evil against man," and "cunning in evil-doing." The Moon rules that which is below, relating to all spirits, demons, ghosts, and other entities occupying the sublunary realms. Phantoms of the unconscious, which might be considered poisons and which are as "real" as one experiences them to be, are made conscious by the unicorn's horn or the Moon's crescent horn, dipping into the unconscious waters and either repelling the poisons or attracting them by sympathy. That the unicorn and Moon both reveal and illuminate the hidden aspects of the psyche may be an explanation for their association with evil, but also for our ability to integrate the unconscious and conscious mind.

In the lunar *dissolutio*, the Moon conducts the waters that act to dissolve the fixed structures of the mind, likened to an overwhelming and world-changing deluge in which we may either succumb to lunacy or else dissolve in oceanic oneness. The Talmud describes a unicorn of enormous size that could not fit inside the ark but managed to survive the Flood by being tied to the outside. When the unconscious threatens the psyche with inundation, the preservation of the unicorn, which is to say purity of mind, or sanity, is affected by an externalization of it. Thus we come to project our unconscious contents onto the world as a means of understanding them. In alchemy, these inner contents are projected into the arcane substance, and in

the creative process, into our creations. It is not until we recognize the origins of the projections, however, hidden deep in the caves of mountains and difficult to capture, that we come to integrate them.

That the unicorn is difficult to capture is partly attributed to its swiftness, like the Moon and Mercury, and also to its proclivity to hide. The unicorn's evasiveness suggests a state of mental purity attained through sequestration, which is at times vital to the creative process. Further, it is in stillness, solitude, and reflection that we attune the intuitive and perceptive capacity of the Third Eye, through which we acquire information beyond the surface level and develop the ability to discern and repel that which is venomous, toxic, or otherwise dangerous. Like the mirroring magic of the Moon, when the Third Eye is functioning clearly, we are naturally drawn toward that which reflects our own state of pure awareness.

SEEING BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

In the conventional education system of our current day, we are primarily trained how to identify, categorize, judge, own, and to be productive and useful members of a materialist society. We aren't taught how to see the subtle things only visible through reflection. The modern child is slowly trained out of their natural attunement with the participation mystique and union with the unconscious into a predominantly conscious, rational attitude toward life, while the mystery of the self and the cosmos slips behind the veil of assumed knowledge and separation from nature. Any anomalous or paranormal occurrences are quickly and rationally categorized and dismissed. Barring a life-altering experience that disrupts the "sleep" of someone who lives entirely above the waters of the unconscious, it is unlikely that this rationalistic training will lead to any depth of true understanding of the self. For others, however, these anomalies are added to a list of inexplicable experiences and unanswered questions that do not rest quietly beneath a blind acceptance of the materialist worldview. As the list grows and the self develops, they are drawn to find answers just as surely as water is pulled by the Moon's gravity.

In her silver splendor pressed against the black veil of night, the Moon only shines because of the Sun, and without the Sun's warmth and drying

effect her moisture would only generate corruption. The Moon's true message is one of attaining to the middle way through the balance of polarity, occupying both heaven and earth as a conscious experience of the participation mystique. Hence the High Priestess occupies the thirteenth path from Tiphareth to Kether on the Tree of Life, the middle pillar between the heart and crown, connecting the individual with the Spirit. This path passes through the Abyss, the hidden sephirah *Daath*, the point where the masculine (Chokmah) and feminine (Binah) principles of the Supreme are conjoined. Chokmah and Binah are the wings of the caduceus, and Isis, Priestess of the Silver Star, guides Spirit upward through the Abyss to the top of the staff in Kether.

The middle pillar of the Tree corresponds to the staff of the caduceus and the central *sushumna nadi*, around which the opposing serpents *ida* and *pingala* interweave and join at *Ajna*. In the *Dhyānabindu Upanishad*, the Third Eye is "the root of the nostrils and the seat of immortality." The tantric process of awakening the *kundalini* is described as drawing the breath up through the three nadis—*ida*, *pingala*, and *sushumna*—as though one were sucking the breath up through a straw. Working with the flow of sexual energy, the semen is redirected upward in the same fashion, to reside in *Ajna*. Like the white and red elixirs of the alchemists, the sexual energy in the *Dhyānabindu* is described in a white form, the *śukra* [semen] that resides between the center of the Moon (*Ajna*) at the eyebrows and *Sahasrara*, the crown, and the red *mahārajas* that has the color of coral and resides in the genitals. These two sexual forces relate to Shiva and Shakti, Sun and Moon, Consciousness and Matter.

Alchemically the red and white Sun and Moon are emblems of the *arbor vitae*, the "tree of life," which is described as a coral tree, an allegory for the philosopher's stone. So In Maier's words, "As Corall grows under Water and is hardened by the Air, so also is the Stone. Mhile beneath the water, the Moon's domain, the coral is of a white color, but when it is resolved of its moisture by the drying effects of air, it is made red, just as the stone undergoes a change of color from white to red in its final coagulation, by which it becomes fixed and hardened, impermeable to destruction. Senior (ibn Umail) called the full moon the "mistress of moisture," the "perfect round stone of the sea," and the "root of this hidden science. In the sea the stone is germinated "like the corals," and washes

up to shore "when the waves and the south wind have calmed down," 86 for when the inner storm blows over, the stone of the integrated personality is liberated from the depths.



Fig. 16.4. The lunar stone of the sea is the root of the tree of life.

From Michael Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens,* 1618. Courtesy of Science History Institute.

It is the Moon that directs the ebb and flow of the serpents in their ascent. According to a passage in *An Open Entrance to the Closed Palace of the King* by Eirenaeus Philalethes, it is "Diana with the wings of her doves" that "opens a passage to the bridal chamber," purifying the "poisonous air." This allows "the youth," Mercury, to shake the "waters above," in the head, into a "rude and ruddy cloud." The "darkness on the face of the abyss," the hidden and mysterious unconscious, is illuminated and integrated as the twin serpents rise, blending the opposites into a singular vision at the Third Eye. The "ruddy cloud" is suggestive of the *rubedo* and consummation of the work, and the birth of the redeemer "Child of the Sun." ⁸⁹

The red King and white Queen come together in the *coniunctio* oppositorum, a union that produces the Mercurial child, who moves freely between the conscious and unconscious. In this way the previously veiled aspects of experience received in the form of dreams, visions, fantasies, psychic phenomena, intuition, and premonition are raised to the level of consciousness to facilitate a more accurate and profound understanding of reality beyond the surface level portrayed by the Sun alone. This is the perception of hidden causes that move about beneath the waters. When the unconscious begins to make itself known, patterns of emotion, behavior, and thought are illuminated, allowing for their resolution as the psyche integrates or releases them with understanding and gnosis.

CONCLUSION

Final Ruminations on the Old, Old Path



All things exist in the human imagination.

—WILLIAM BLAKE

THIS BOOK HAS ENDEAVORED TO PROVIDE a historical foundation for the Hermetic teachings, and to extract their essence through a philosophical system that serves as a means of deepening one's personal relationship with the Divine. I have attempted to present, as clearly as possible, the Hermetic cosmogony and the journey of the soul from its involution into matter through its evolution to gnosis. Further, throughout this work I have introduced the basis for Creative Alchemy, the aim of which is the liberation of the imagination and the realization of one's fullest creative potential. A fundamental understanding of alchemy's underlying philosophies as well as a thorough comprehension of the planets and their correspondences is the foundation of this practice.

For those who find themselves on a Hermetic path of self-initiation, or perhaps just curious about the subject, this book is a resource and a guide, but by no means is it the final word on these matters. One must immerse oneself in both practical creative work and devout study of contemporary and traditional sources, as well as form a personal understanding of the

material. In particular, reading the theological and philosophical *Hermetica* is essential, for they are in themselves an initiation into gnosis. As concerns the technical *Hermetica* and arcane alchemical texts, there is much to be gained in their reading even if understanding is evasive, for in between the lines of obscurity the truth will be revealed in time. Yet it is not enough to remain in the mental realm. We must also engage emotionally and physically in order to integrate these teachings and begin the work of transmuting planetary energies into their most exalted and noble forms. Like the trinity of Body, Mind, and Soul, we are tasked with the integration of feeling, thought, and action, a union that will elevate us as individuals and form a bridge between our internal healing and its externalization, by which we share our unique gifts with the world.

At the core of the Hermetic teachings is the idea that all of life is part of one, seamless field of creation, ever-changing and yet eternal. In the solitary work of self-realization, we must not lose sight of our obligation to the betterment of all life, which is to say consciousness itself. Our individual contribution will be entirely unique, and through continually purifying and refining the content of our bodies, minds, and souls, we can aspire to endow our gifts with authenticity and a spiritual potency that will be of great benefit not only to ourselves, but to others as well.

Do not be mistaken that there is an end to this work, nor let yourself be deceived into believing in an ultimate perfection; it is a life-long process, and yet there are moments of triumph over the vices and corruptions that have enslaved us, and even more moments of failure. With the victories come great powers, and great responsibility. The only perfection that can be attained exists in this moment, in its unbroken completion. While we strive for perfection in our alchemical work, we come to know that true perfection lies in how clearly we can relate to the All-That-Is, which exists in eternal perfection. We each have our seasons of light and dark, and mustn't be discouraged when all of our hard work seems to be for nought. Rather, what happens through a devoted practice of Hermeticism and Creative Alchemy is that we develop resilience to the hardships of life and a deeply fixed faith in our eternal and true Self. This is the true *lapis philosophorum*, the elixir of life, equivalent to Hermetic gnosis, and the means by which you may perform the most sublime transmutations in your life.

Is it possible to create the philosopher's stone through one's very own creative process, without the use of any laboratory equipment? In my next book, I will rely on the foundational understanding of Hermeticism's roots developed here to explore a practical approach to the art of Creative Alchemy. Hopefully, after our immersive journey through the planetary spheres, we have begun to see how these energies relate to the creative process as well as to our personal stories and experiences in life; inspiring the imagination and opening up the possibility of that Hermetic ideal of deenergizing the seven rulers to reach the eighth sphere of creative freedom. In that book, we will look at how artists throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attempted to liberate the imagination from societal constraints; how they sought to reestablish the subjective as a valid lens with which to view reality; and how the role of the unconscious in art came into focus and found its efflorescence in Surrealism. During this sojourn we will see how alchemy infused itself into the minds of these artists and found expression both metaphorically and practically. From here we will take an immersive journey through the *magnum opus*, the "Great Work," exploring the four stages of the nigredo, albedo, citrinitas, and rubedo—which we have touched on in this book—and applying these to the creative process in a way that results in both inner and outer transmutation.

While engaging with the alchemical *opus*, this first book can be referred to as a reference when seeking deeper insight into the planetary archetypes that you are working with in your own process of transmutation, as well as to the fundamental philosophy underlying the alchemical *opus*. After ascending the Hermetic tree from its roots and into its vastly sprawling branches, and after traveling from the boundless abyss to making the journey through the seven spheres, your mind has been saturated with the teachings of Hermes and the multivalent qualities of the spheres. As you begin to recognize the ways in which these energies are working through your life, finding your own personal myth within theirs, you will begin to unlock their secret powers that reside in the chakras. This experience will help to inform you as you embark on the *magnum opus* to not only liberate your imagination, but to purify, through the processes of alchemy, the seven essential layers of your being so that your authenticity and unique gifts shine through in whatever you create.

In my own life, uniting the Hermetic path with art has been a richly rewarding experience, instilling within me an unwavering trust in my

creative process, as well as the ups and downs of life. It was the means by which I made it through the long, dark night of the soul, precipitated by a terrifying encounter with the *prima materia*. This was a near-death experience and simultaneous kundalini awakening that left me shattered and searching desperately for solid ground. All of my usual methods of selfregulating seemed to exacerbate my separation and fear. Incidentally, it was at this time that my journey with oil painting and my alchemical initiation began. I learned that I could transmute my pain through visual symbols, and by uniting art and alchemy, I was able to reassemble myself after a complete psychological dismemberment and separation of soul and spirit. Thus commenced many years of gazing into the alchemical retort in my "lab"—my studio—and a slow digestion of the secret matter I had retrieved from the abyss. I understood that every painting was an alchemical process, and I treated the canvas like an empty retort in which I placed the material to be rectified or transmuted. When I wasn't painting, I was reading everything I could get my hands on about Hermeticism—alchemy, magic, astrology, Qabalah, and tarot; as well as mythology, meditation, and psychology. Hermeticism seemed to be the key that unlocked all of the spiritual traditions and brought them to union.

My practice of Hermeticism and alchemy has led to a deeply intentional existence from which my creative expression has blossomed in ways I never could have foreseen when I started out. On this magical-alchemical path the separation between subjective and objective reality dissolves, allowing for a continual dialogue between the inner and outer experience. This work has taught me the art of listening, so that in every instance the unconscious voice may be heard; to look into the ineffable face of the mystery and extract the essence of an idea, and then to bring it into form. Dreams, subtle impressions, signs from nature, and subliminal messages become part of a rich tapestry to gaze upon in self-reflection, and from which to draw upon for subject matter. When combined with planetary magic and mythology, this can lead to some unexpected, surreal, and revelatory results.

Every new creation is a universe of its own; I've come to understand art as a sacred act, a communion with the gods; to see mythology as a living story and see myself as a conduit for cosmic energies to express themselves and to evolve. I've descended to the *kur* and abandoned heaven and earth; hung like a rotting piece of meat upon the walls of the underworld and

hidden in a cave until I was strong enough to emerge and overcome my enemies; banished my creations to the depths of the earth and resurrected them from the flames; dissolved into a puddle upon my studio floor and surrendered to every conceivable torture; walked like a giant with my head in the clouds and carried a toad in my womb; split myself in two and circled the earth in both directions in order to find myself staring at my own umbilicus; come to the crossroads in the garden of Venus and endured her trials; leapt between the spired horns of Lucifer; wept for the Anima Mundi; bathed in the fountain of the Moon; jumped in the lap of a virgin; I've been seduced by the swan and the white bull and I've rolled beneath the murky waters in the maws of the crocodile; sublimated generations of trauma and guilt and pierced the crocodile's scales; found the mother stone and the toad stone and the carbuncle beneath the unicorn's horn; found meaning in the patterns of my leprous patina and turned it into rolling hills; and I've ascended to the eighth sphere and sang in silence the hymns of the Nameless One. I've done all this and more because nothing is impossible in the imagination, and imagination is life.

The seven planets, spheres, and chakras are gateways to the unconscious; feeling speaks to the subliminal mind. Feeling ourselves in the role of the archetypes is a way of both honoring them and assisting in their evolution in the greater consciousness. Along the way we develop a personal relationship with them and recognize their signs wherever we go, reflecting back to us where we are currently oriented in our work. When these seven gateways are fully open and cleared of obstructions, and their opposing energies are de-energized and brought to union, we can then come to experience the transcendental reality of the eighth sphere that holds the others within it and exists above the harmony. In my personal experience, I relate this to the feeling of being in complete flow with the internal and external elements of one's life, often marked by a flood of synchronicities, intensified dreams, psychic phenomena, increased skills in astral projection, communication with Nature, elemental balance, and the ability to selfregulate emotions, feelings, and thoughts. With this comes a strengthening of the will and an unshakable trust in the process, which ultimately leads to a surrender to Divine Will. This surrender does not mean a relinquishing of volition, but that one's personal will is in alignment with Divine Will, which is the essence of spiritual magnetism. To maintain such a state

requires practice and can be facilitated through meditation, Creative Alchemy, and devotion.

We began our journey together in the introduction with the premise from the Hermetic treatise called "The Cup or Monad": "Tis very hard, to leave the things we have grown used to, which meet our gaze on every side, and turn ourselves back to the Old Old [Path]" (CH 4.9). We who walk the Old Old Path, who revere gnosis and detest falsehood, recognize that without the right and left, there would be no path at all. The danger of realizing one's union with the All-That-Is, is to become drunk with solipsism and blinded by narcissism, unable to reconcile the paradox that the Self is All, and also the Many. Such arrogance will meet its demise, in the same way that Icarus and Phäethon both came to fall. Icarus escaped the labyrinth but did not heed his father's warning to keep to the middle path between the solar flames and the lunar sea, and fell to his death in the unconscious waters. True spiritual maturity allows us to fly between the scorching rays of consciousness and the dissolving waters. This is real freedom. Yet sometimes it is not until we fall that we attain the wisdom necessary to steady our wings and take to the middle path. Phaëthon ("shining") drove his father's chariot and horses across the heavens and lost control, igniting the earth in flames and destroying entire cities and nations, drying up rivers and transforming the fertile land of Africa into desert. Earth herself opened her parched lips to beg the King of the Gods to end the destruction, lest everything return to primal chaos. Jove struck Phaëthon with a thunderbolt, stopping the fiery chariot, and Phaëthon fell to his death. Such is the disaster that befalls the untrained and arrogant mind, driven off course by unconscious forces. Not only do we harm ourselves by our ignorance, but the world around us as well.

While the Sun beckons us upward to align with the Divine through its emanations, the Moon keeps us on the middle path through a humbling reflection of our own illusions. Unifying the opposing principles is the key to living a balanced, harmonious existence and to an uninhibited expression of creativity. Thus we walk, in light and shadow, in the perfection of our imperfections, trusting in the creative process as it unfolds.



Footnotes

- *1. In the context of Jewish mysticism, we will use this spelling of Kabbalah, differentiated from Qabala as is used in other contexts throughout this book, which refers to the occult tradition that has evolved out of Jewish Kabbalah and Hermetic Kabbalah as here described.
- *2. $Heimarmen\bar{e} = fate$.
- *3. Specifically occult magic, which aims to effect real changes within the individual practitioner and in the world, not to be confused with performative, entertainment, or stage magic that relies on tricks, sleight of hand, and illusions. Though it has become popular to spell magic with a *k* at the end, as in *magick*, a practice credited to Aleister Crowley, we will rely on the traditional *magic* for simplicity's sake.
- *4. Atonement is to be understood as unification, or to be "at one."
- *5. In certain contexts the male-female relationship between Sulfur and Mercury is reversed. Usually this occurs when the soul, which as a principle is associated with Sulfur, is identified with the *anima*, which is the feminine soul. On the other hand Mercury, called by the name *animus* or *spiritus*, takes on the male role of the logos. Understand that like the Chinese yang and yin, each has a bit of the other within it inherently. Thus there are certain contexts in which the principle polarities are reversed.
- *6. Copenhaver's translation lists them as (1) increase and decrease, (2) evil machination, (3) the illusion of longing, (4) the ruler's arrogance, (5) unholy presumption and daring recklessness, (6) the evil impulses that come from wealth, and (7) the deceit that lies in ambush (*Hermetica*, 6). As to the matching of the planets to the zones, see Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 105 and 115.

- *7. Rotation refers to its movement around its own axis and is not to be confused with its revolution around the Sun.
- *8. Not to be confused with Buddha, the founder of Buddhism.
- *9. The third eye is associated with the pineal gland in many contexts, but also with the pituitary gland. When the third eye is alternatively associated with the pituitary, then the crown chakra, ruled by the Sun, is assigned to the pineal gland instead. Since it is the union of Sol and Luna that we are concerned with in alchemy, we understand that both of these glands relate to both of these chakras in different ways.

Endnotes

INTRODUCTION. THE HERMETIC PATH OF SELF-INITIATION

- 1. Waddell, Manetho, 209.
- 2. Waddell, *Manetho*, ix.
- 3. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xv–xvi.
- 4. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:131.
- 5. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:146.
- 6. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:146.
- 7. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2: 90.
- 8. Valentinus, "Concerning the Great Stone of the Ancient Sages," 315.
- Valentinus, "Concerning the Great Stone of the Ancient Sages," 316–317.
- 10. Mead, Apollonius, 63.
- 11. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:17.
- 12. Faivre, "Renaissance Hermeticism," 109–10.
- 13. Faivre, "Renaissance Hermeticism," 109–10.
- 14. Hanegraaff, "Hermes Trismegistus," 2.

1. HERMETIC TEXTS

- 1. Waddell, Manetho, 209.
- 2. Bullock, "Hermetic Philosophy," 5.

- 3. Salaman et al., The Way of Hermes, 81; Yates, Giordano Bruno, 26.
- 4. Ebeling, *The Secret History*, 3.
- 5. Bullock, "Hermetic Philosophy," 6; Yates, Giordano Bruno, 6.
- **6**. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 304–5.
- 7. Ebeling, *The Secret History*, 9.
- 8. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xxxii–xxxiii; Hanegraaff, "Hermes Trismegistus," 2.
- 9. Scott, *Hermetica*, 1.
- <u>10</u>. Cotnoir, *Alchemy*, 41.
- 11. Hauck, The Emerald Tablet, 17.
- 12. Pomeroy et al., Ancient Greece, 409.
- 13. Hauck, The Emerald Tablet, 20.
- 14. Ebeling, The Secret History, 49.
- 15. Hermes Trismegistus, "The Emerald Tablet of Hermes," available at Sacred-Texts (website), accessed September 19, 2021.
- 16. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 1:7–8.
- <u>17</u>. Salaman et al., *The Way of Hermes*, 9, 85.
- 18. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 1:7–8; Eliade, A History, 3:251.
- 19. Eliade, A History, 3:251; Yates, Giordano Bruno, 12–13.
- 20. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 1:7–9.
- 21. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 125.
- 22. Salaman et al., The Way of Hermes, 77.
- 23. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:281.
- 24. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 60; Salaman et al., *The Way of Hermes*, 76.
- 25. Mahé, "The Definitions," 101.

- 26. Quispel, "The Asclepius," 74.
- 27. Mahé, "The Definitions," 109–18.
- 28. Ebeling, *The Secret History*, 10.
- 29. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:391.
- 30. Mahé and Meyer, "Perfect Discourse," 425.
- 31. Goodrick-Clarke, Western Esoteric Traditions, 34.
- 32. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:307.
- 33. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:309.
- <u>34</u>. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, 2:332.
- 35. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 90.
- 36. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 81.
- <u>37</u>. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 90.
- 38. Copenhaver, Hermetica, 81.
- 39. Copenhaver, Hermetica, 81.
- <u>40</u>. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 83; Mahé and Meyer, "Perfect Discourse," 435.
- 41. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 84.
- 42. Ebeling, The Secret History, 10; Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 1:3–4.
- 43. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, 3:93–94.
- 44. Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels, xiii–xvii.
- 45. Mahé and Meyer, "The Prayer of Thanksgiving," 419.
- 46. Mahé and Meyer, "The Prayer of Thanksgiving," 423; Mead, *ThriceGreatest Hermes*, 2:390.
- 47. Mahé and Meyer, "Perfect Discourse," 425.
- 48. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 3:222–25.

2. THOTH AND THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ROOTS OF THE HERMETIC TRADITION

- 1. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 3:95; Scott, Hermetica, 459.
- 2. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, 3:96–97.
- 3. Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 84–86.
- 4. Lurker, Gods and Symbols, 68–69.
- 5. Ions, Egyptian Mythology, 84–86.
- 6. Lurker, Gods and Symbols, 121.
- 7. Oldfather, *Diodorus* (4 25.3), 425.
- 8. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 21.
- 9. Plutarch, Moralia, 25–27.
- <u>10</u>. Guthrie, *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, 60–61.
- 11. Waite, Turba Philosophorum, 9.
- 12. Hedesan, "Glossary," 169–70.
- 13. Russell, Western Philosophy, 105.
- 14. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 2:279; Scott, Hermetica, 9.
- 15. Mead, *Thrice-Greatest Hermes*, 1:129–38.
- 16. Mead, Thrice-Greatest Hermes, 1:136–38.
- <u>17</u>. Scott, *Hermetica*, 12.
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About the Author

MARLENE SEVEN BREMNER is a self-taught oil painter, writer, and teacher who has spent more than 20 years exploring esoteric and spiritual traditions, including Hermeticism, alchemy, surrealism, symbolism, tarot, psychology, magic, astrology, shamanism, and mythology. She developed her career as an artist in the Pacific Northwest and now spends her time painting and writing in the New Mexico desert.

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